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Who Is A Jew? The Supreme Court & The Supreme Judge

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered February 14, 1970)

One of the grand old men of Hebrew letters in Israel, Eliezer Steinman, wrote מי הוא יהודי? מי הוא יהודי? שאינו שואל, מי הוא יהודי? *“Who is a Jew? One who doesn't ask, ‘Who is a Jew?’”*

The very raising of the question in our days is a troubling phenomenon. It means that our very identity, our Jewishness, has become problematical. It indicates that all of Jewish continuity has been brought under a question mark.

This issue has plagued the State almost since its very inception, and now has returned once again to monopolize public attention and stir public controversy, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

The problem does not concern Israeli citizenship. A political state comprises many different ethnic, racial, and religious groups. Even in ancient Israel, a non-Jew (ger toshav) was accepted as a citizen. What is at issue is Jewish nationality. Here the Halakhah is quite clear: a Jew is one born to a Jewish mother (regardless of his commitments or conduct) or properly converted to Judaism (in which case the conversion must be performed in a certain manner, and the convert must be genuinely committed to Torah). The Jewish tradition recognizes no other yardstick for entering Jewish peoplehood. Hence, any decision by the State concerning nationality (as opposed to citizenship) is of immediate importance to Jews the world over – as significant to the ten million Jews in the Diaspora as to the two million in the State.

In the most recent incident, the Supreme Court decided in the Shalit case to jettison the traditional criterion of Jewishness. A minority of four judges reaffirmed the halakhic standard, and in effect declared that there is no separation between nationality and religion; a Jew must fit into both categories or none. A majority of judges, five of them, decided to distinguish between nationality and

religion, and permit a man to adopt Jewish nationality by simple declaration of intent, even if the Jewish religion does not regard him as Jewish. They preferred the subjective criterion (do I love Israel? Have I sacrificed for the Jewish people?) to the objective halakhic rule (birth to a Jewish mother or conversion).

The majority pointed to certain absurdities if the halakhic standard were to be accepted, as the minority wished. For instance, a son of a Jewish mother who joins the El Fatah and is an enemy of the State of Israel is considered Jewish, whereas the children of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish naval officer who has participated in the life of the State and sacrificed for it, are considered non-Jewish. Justice Silberg, who wrote a profound opinion as one of the minority judges, responded that the El Fatah Jew is simply a contemptible, wicked Jew, whereas the children of the petitioner in the present case are wonderful and noble Gentiles. But Jewishness, as he put it, is not an honorary doctorate that is awarded for specific achievements or accomplishments.

It should be added that every law, by its very nature, is productive of anomalies. Any law, no matter how fair and just, can be made to look ridiculous by pointing to certain exceptional cases. But we must realize that these rare cases are the price we pay for the greater good of the entire community. The only alternative is to abandon law altogether.

Furthermore, the halakhic standard, because it is objective, is much fairer than a subjective standard, in which judges may conceivably be called upon to check whether a man really has his heart and soul with the Jewish state. The objective standard is clear and identifiable, whereas the subjective one – the adoption of Jewishness by nationality on the basis of intent and willingness to share in the State – is something that could be the way to a king of

modern Inquisition.

But the majority prevailed, and the halakhic definition was abandoned. As I mentioned to the reporter of the New York Times who quoted me in that paper, the Court was asked, "Who is Jew?" and answered, as if with a Jewish shrug of the shoulders, "Who isn't a Jew!" Or, as the headline in an Anglo-Jewish weekly put it more humorously and perhaps even more sharply, "You don't have to be Jewish to be a Jew."

However, more recently, the Knesset has voided the Supreme Court decision and has, thereby, confirmed the halakhic view of Jewishness.

It has been charged by many in Israel that the Knesset vote was a matter of the majority bowing to political pressure exerted by the religious parties in order to maintain the coalition that gives the Government its stability. I do not believe that that is the whole truth, or even most of the truth. A number of non-Orthodox people in Government have told me quite honestly that they find it more convenient to blame the religious parties for exerting political pressure on them, but if there were no religious parties, they would have to vote their own consciences, according to which, despite their secularism, they feel that the State must have some historic and spiritual continuity, which can only be provided by Jewish tradition and by Halakhah as regards this most basic of all questions. My own experience, in a limited way, has convinced me of the same. At a recent five-day Ideological Seminar of the World Union of Jewish Students near Helsinki, Finland, Mr. Uri Avneri, who is one of the most vocal opponents of the halakhic standard (and who might be described as the unofficial state pornographer of Israel), declared before the assembled students that there is a definite break between Israelism and Jewishness, that the relation between Diaspora Jews and Israeli citizens is no more close or meaningful than that between the Australian and the Englishman, or the Swiss-German and the German-German. When he made these statements, he was heckled from the floor and the reaction against him was extremely powerful – specifically by the non-Orthodox students, who thereby revealed that in certain "gut" issues they will not depart from the tradition.

Why do I speak of this now that the Knesset has affirmed the halakhic criterion and the problem is solved?

Because the problem is not solved, it is only delayed. First, a Court decision of this kind is a symptom of a profound, national malaise that cannot be overlooked; it has a moral force that must be reckoned with. Second, coalitions change,

political realignments occur, new ideas take hold, and a new Knesset may decide to uphold the Supreme Court. Third, the problem will unquestionably be reopened in the very near future. The original text suggested for the Knesset vote was that one be recognized as a Jew who is *בן לאם יהודיה או מי שנתגייר לפי דין תורה*, that is, one who is the son of a Jewish mother or one who has been converted according to the law of the Torah. In the final reading, approved by the Knesset, the last several words were omitted, and we are left only with a statement that one is recognized as a Jew if he is born to a Jewish mother or if he is converted – with no mention of its legitimacy according to the law of the Torah. This means that the State will now face the problem of recognizing Reform conversions as legitimate. Needless to say, we do not do so. Halakhah regards a Reform conversion as utterly meaningless. Perhaps the typical American, in his ecumenical euphoria, would want Orthodox Jews to be more "sportsmanlike" about accepting Reform conversions. We shall then have to declare our unsportsmanship, and say that our principles, which are not subject to change by whim or caprice, do not permit us to accept a Reform conversion as Jewishly legitimate. Orthodox rabbis in the United States now check, as a matter of course, into the third generation of both bride and groom who come to them for marriage. If we discover that a conversion occurred presided over by a Reform rabbi, we know that we cannot marry this couple unless a re-conversion takes place. As an aside, for those who may consider such a policy as overly-restrictive, may I offer the following information to explain, additionally, why we cannot accept the genuineness of a Reform conversion: I am reliably informed by a leading Reform rabbi that over a third of Reform rabbis will preside at the intermarriage of a Jew and a non-Jew without conversion by the non-Jew, and that the great majority of the other Reform rabbis will "refer" such couples to their colleagues who do preside at such marriages. In fact, there is a list of 35 rabbis in the Metropolitan area who will gladly officiate at a Jewish-non-Jewish wedding. Hence, the problem still is unsolved and no doubt will return to vex us in the near future.

Who does this issue agitate us so? Why is it so important to us? Obviously, it bothers us because it touches the very core of our being, the very essence of our deepest commitments. Orthodox Jews regard the Supreme Court decision as calamitous religiously, historically, and Zionistically.

Religiously, it strikes at what Judaism considers the

essence of the history of the people of Israel: the berit or Covenant between Israel and God. The distinctiveness of our people, what has safeguarded its perilous journey through the ages, is its special relationship to God confirmed at Sinai, a Covenant of which the record is the Torah and of which the mitzvot are the conditions. That Covenant legitimates the inseparability of God and Israel or, in other words, Jewish nationality and Jewish religion. Now, one can violate one or another of the conditions of the Covenant without being guilty of reneging on the basic relationship. But when Israel declares that it divorces nationality from religion, it denies the essence of the Covenant – the principle that this people is the people of God. The Supreme Court decision, therefore, represents an act of betrayal by Israel. It strikes at the heart of the Covenant – and thereby breaks the hearts of those who are loyal to it.

Historically too it is a misfortune. The State of Israel was not created *ab ovo*, from an egg, completely new, as it were. It is the product of centuries of hoping and praying and living and dying. For the Jewish nation today to reject the Jewish religion which gave birth to it after a 3500-year pregnancy, is a kind of matricide. (This seems to be a peculiarly contemporary Jewish obsession. One might almost see in it a projection onto a historic scale of that psychological aberration enshrined in contemporary literature in that obscene best-seller by a Jewish author who reviles and rejects his Jewish mother.)

The logic of the Supreme Court decision does not stop with according the status of “Jew” to an atheist who is not Jewish by halakhic standards. It must include even those who have religious commitments other than the Jewish. Thus, we will now have “Christian Jews,” “Moslem Jews,” “Hindu Jews,” etc. But is this the mutation that generations of Jews labored to bring forth? Six million Jews died in the Holocaust, probably a majority of them were Orthodox. At least retroactively they may have had some infinitesimal consolation, that out of their agony would rise a state that would perpetuate the memory of the Jewish people. They died with an *ani maamin*, a song of faith – if not on their lips then deep in their hearts – that their anguish would not be meaningless, that something enduring would come of all this. But for what? For a State which will officially consider *meshumadim* as Jews? It is not merely that the Supreme Court decision will encourage and accelerate the rate of assimilation of many Jews. It is more than that – it is an effort to assimilate the whole people in one stroke.

If this decision were implemented, or ever will be, it will contribute to the cutting of the roots connecting Israel’s past and Israel’s present, and will reduce the State of Israel into little more than a technologically muscle-bound, spiritually unimportant little democracy on the shores of the Mediterranean, and one which, in addition, will appear to aid and abet our enemies’ charges that Israel is an outpost of Western cultural imperialism in the Arab world. So that historically too, the rupture between nationality and religion is an act of betrayal or at least of ingratitude.

Zionistically, such a decision is totally self-defeating. Our rights to Eretz Israel are grounded in the Abrahamic Covenant. In 1947 and 1948, Zionist leaders who presented our case to the United Nations maintained that the origin and sanction of our claims are contained in the Bible and in the subsequent history in which Jewish religion impelled us to return to the Jewish homeland. Only recently (New York Times, February 14, 1970) we read that the World Jewish Congress officials have been meeting with representatives of the World Council of Churches because the former are troubled by the Christian contention that the Bible is being misused to support Jewish views. “It was feared that this could be interpreted as challenging the Jewish view that the Bible justifies the claim to Israel as a homeland.” Without Jewish religion, there is no Jewish nationality, and there is no Jewish “national homeland.”

Let us be realistic. Not all critics of the State of Israel are malevolent and anti-Semitic. Some of them, although assuredly not all of them or even most of them, genuinely try to see the conflict in which we are embroiled in an objective manner. And, from an impersonal and objective point of view, it is possible to conclude that Israel’s case is not as air-tight as we have imagined, and the Arabs may have some merit in their contentions. It is only in the context of the Divine promise, of the Covenant, that we have inalienable and unalterable rights to the Holy Land. Once we have cut ourselves off from that Covenant, the whole foundation of our case collapses, and we are in danger of appearing as hyper-efficient outsiders who have unjustly exploited what we ourselves consider as nothing more than an ancient myth, to usurp the land of others. It is the Covenant which says, above all else, that this people and God are intertwined with each other. And it is only that Covenant which assigns the land of Canaan to the people of Israel.

As Rashi put it in his opening comment to Genesis: Why does the Torah begin with a record of the divine

creation of the world? “So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, ‘You are thieves, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations (who occupied Palestine from antiquity), you will be able to answer, ‘All the world belongs to the Holy One. He created it, and He gave it to whom He pleased. He willed to give it to them, and He willed to take it from them and give it to us.’”

We cannot be eclectic and accept the Covenant only for political purposes and reject it for all other reasons. Let us remember that were the relationship between nationality and religion severed at any point in the past, there would be today no State of Israel, and no Israeli naval officers – and no Israeli Supreme Court.

That is why, as religious Jews, we feel impelled to react as vigorously as we do. The State of Israel is too dear to us to accept without protest the grievous decision which can only exacerbate (as it has already begun to do) the deep divisions within Israel’s citizenry. It threatens to alienate from Israel many of the Jews of the Diaspora, who are probably five times as numerous as those within the borders of the State.

We who are committed religious Jews, inside of Israel and outside, will continue using the halakhic criterion exclusively, no matter what any Supreme Court says. Religious principle is not subject to majority veto.

A great contemporary Hasidic leader has pointed to the Talmudic maxim that “יחיד ורבים הלכה כרבים”: when, in a dispute of law, we have the scholarly opinions of the one against the many, the Halakhah or law is decided in favor of the many. Why, he asks, should not this legal maxim be expressed more economically as simply “הלכה כרבים,” “the law remains with the majority?” Why is it necessary to have the additional two words, “יחיד ורבים,” “the one and the many?” He answers that the word “יחיד,” the one, refers to God, the One who created the universe. When do we say that “הלכה כרבים,” that the law remains with the many or majority? – only when “יחיד ורבים,” when the majority has with it the One, when it is expressive of the truth of God. Otherwise, truth prevails despite any majority.

That is a principled and correct sentiment, and it does not detract from its essential truth that the author of this statement is the Satmarer Rebbe.

So even if the Knesset had not overruled the Supreme Court, that ruling would have no effect on us in our daily lives. Religiously committed Jews shall continue to look upon Jewishness as legitimated only by the Halakhah.

What shall determine our conduct is not the decision

of those whom the world regards as the Supreme Court of Israel, but the One whom Israel regards as the Supreme Judge of the world.

It is because these issues are so very important to us that a good deal of re-thinking has already been initiated, and more will certainly take place.

I cannot accept the idea that no matter what the Government of Israel decides, we must not react because “we love Israel.” This is myopic view. Love accepts, but it is also critical. To love does not mean to suspend one’s critical faculties. A parent who spoils a child by overindulging his every whim, does not really love him; he is only kind to him but is not really interested in him. True love accepts faults, but always strives to make the object of the love better, improved, more lovable. That is our attitude to Israel: we love it, and so we are terribly unhappy about its most recent fault.

There is another reaction that emerged instinctively in the hearts of some of us when the Supreme Court decision was announced: “Stop supporting Israel, let us ignore the State, let us begin to withdraw and retreat into our own community and make sure that we survive as the proper kind of Jews.” That may be psychologically understandable, but it is Jewishly an inexcusable sentiment. It is an unthinkable thought. We dare not even entertain such a notion. For if love accepts and is critical, then let us be critical, but let us also accept. Israel is the land of our brothers, the children of the survivors of Hitler. They are our Jews. Even without crises, even if its existence were not constantly called into question, we would not cease to identify with it.

What seems to be emerging – and I mention this descriptively, without evaluation – is an emotional reorientation in which a distinction is made or felt between Eretz Israel and Medinat Israel, between historic Israel of the generations, and the little State that exists today. There is continued appreciation of the State as the home for Jewish refugees, and admiration for its many achievements, but the spiritual affinity is considerably weakened. In the wake of the Government’s self-desacralization has come a disenchantment. And with this disenchantment there may come a reassessment of our emotional priorities, granting relatively more importance to the spiritual welfare of our own American Jewry and of East European Jewry, both of which are bigger in population than the Jewish community of the State of Israel.

I do not recommend that feeling. I am deeply saddened and disturbed by it. But it is the kind of emotion and attitude that we must expect if the State will ever enforce a non-halakhic standard on so basic an issue or even continue to proclaim that it is refraining from doing so only because of nefarious political pressure by religious parties.

I believe that no matter what the legal and political situation is, we must begin now to rethink our entire position – not in a surge of initial resentment, but in a calm and collected manner. And we must begin to reassess some of our practical policies.

Intellectually, we shall have to undertake what contemporary theologians call a procedure of “demythologizing.” Religious Zionists and the Rabbinat have heretofore ascribed a certain Messianic quality to the State of Israel. They have seen it, whether explicitly or implicitly, as the initial stages of the Messianic kingdom-to-come. They have referred to it as the *אתחלתא דגאולה*, the beginning of the Redemption, and have referred to it in our prayers for the State as *ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו*, the first blossoming of our Redemption. But clearly, a State of Jews in which nationality is divorced from religion will find it difficult to lay claim to such honorific Messianic pretenses.

It will be much healthier for us and much less confusing, even if more painful, to begin to see the State of Israel in a more realistic light – as not necessarily the Jewish State foreseen by our Prophets and dreamed of by our forebears. Of course, as religious Jews, we accept it as part of a divine plan. I personally feel quite strongly that the State does mark a significant turning point in Jewish history, and that it figures most prominently in the calculus of Israel’s relationship with God. I have made known my convictions, both orally and in writing, that the emergence of the State of Israel indicates the first break in the *hester panim* (“hiding of the face” or eclipse) of God that has lasted for centuries. However, this is much different from assigning Messianic significance and status to the State.

Of course I do not mean to deny the possible, even probable, role of the State of Israel in the Messianic redemptive process. To do so would be absurd. Rather, I prefer to suspend any judgment on this issue, and to avoid all such speculations. It is now time for us to disabuse ourselves of the spiritual presumptuousness which leads us to identify the stages of the Redemption, to indicate which step the Messiah is taking. We must learn to live without such illusions. We must not be distracted by all

this talk about Israel as either the end or the beginning of the Redemption. We have a long and disturbing history of premature anticipation of the Messiah. More than once in the past, when people began to attribute Messianic qualities to individuals, they were later disappointed, and the disappointment left permanent scars in the body of the Jewish people. What happened with individuals can happen with a State.

Second, such Messianic pretenses attributed to the State have a double effect upon us, and paradoxically both effects are opposite to each other. On the one hand, it leads us to expect too much from the State. That is unfair to the government and the population, and leaves us resentful when the State does not live up to our high expectations. On the other hand, it causes us to suspend any criticism, because who will dare to judge adversely a Messianic State?

Third, such Messianic attributions, such a reading of the State of Israel as part of a *heilsgeschichte*, has a tendency to relieve us individually of too much responsibility. We begin to think that God will take care of things, and that we can relax; so, for instance, the great act of national *teshuvah* or repentance will be brought about by God, and we need not bother talking to those people who as yet have not been brought to Torah. But this is a mistake. We forget that if we are ethically faulty or morally flabby or spiritually stale, we will repel the non-observant from Torah, and that no magic conversion will take place. It is our job. The Talmud (*Sanh. 97a*) tells us that the Messiah will come in *היסח הדעת*, at a time of distraction, when people are not thinking about him. It is only when people will be too busy to speculate about him because they are preoccupied in creating the right kind of environment, the proper kind of society, a genuine Jewish environment, that the world and especially Israel will be ready to receive the Messiah.

So we must learn to see Israel as it is, and not only as it is, and not only as we would like it to be. We must look on it without illusions, but with ideals and visions. And this must lead us to a new course of action.

Primarily, we must recognize that although the majority of Israelis are non-observant, they remain our brothers. We must continue to support them, their security and their economy, not one iota less than we did before. We may have certain differing commitments – but one destiny.

Second, because we are brothers, we must increase our spiritual help and exert ourselves to do much more than before in order to save and enhance the Jewish character

of the State. We can no longer rely upon Messiah or some mysterious redemptive process to do that automatically. We must plan for the day that, possibly, Religion and State will be officially separated in Israel. That will no doubt be bad, and will create havoc insofar as the unity of the State is concerned, because two different marriage systems will prevail, and intermarriage between the two may ultimately become very difficult. But with all these dangers, there will be some blessings in disguise. The air will be cleared. We will have an opportunity to talk to non-observant Jews unencumbered with the onus of our political affiliations. When we speak as Orthodox Jews to the non-observant, we will not be automatically suspected of looking for partisan advantage. We will not be greeted by a silent but deep anti-clericalism. We will be able – and we should begin right now – to have genuine dialogue with non-observant Jews, “selling” ourselves and our way of life, not negotiating for political bargains. Israeli Jews must begin to build bridges between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox communities – and if Israeli Orthodox Jews are unwilling or incapable of doing it by themselves, then we from America must encourage and help them. We must tell them not that we want their votes, but that we want to share with them our mutual Covenant and our Torah, out of love and not out of superiority – because we are not necessarily superior at all. We must come armed not only with answers, but also with a shared quest, inviting them to join us in the search for the meaning that we can derive out of Torah.

Finally, American Jewish philanthropy must begin to follow through on these ideas by offering increased support to organizations such as “Gesher” which are attempting to do just that – to go out to high schools and the universities, to the cities and towns, to kibbutzim and moshavot, and talk as brothers to those who are outside the camp of Torah. We must begin to pay much more attention to those religious institutions, from kindergarten up, which prepare young Orthodox Israelis for a productive life within the State, teaching them not to retreat into ghettos within

Sacred Work

Dr. Erica Brown

Leaders,” writes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in *The Home We Build Together*, “do not do the work on behalf of the people. They teach people how to do the work themselves.” These words offer an important perspective

Israel, but to relate and communicate the messages and the ideas of Torah. We must increase our support for those schools – whether yeshiva, high school, university, or trade school – which create the type of student who is both in and of the State, who is totally committed to Torah, but who is part and parcel of the social fabric of Israel, one with whom non-observant Israelis can identify and, from whom they can therefore also learn.

A demythologizing of Israel will thus lead us not to withdraw, but to renew our efforts towards the great need of the hour: reconciliation, unity, peace.

In the Mechilta, R. Yohanan b. Zakkai refers to the commandment which forbids us to use metal tools, such as the axe or the hammer, in building the altar. The altar, he says, was used as the means for reconciling God with Israel (the word *korban* comes from the word *karov*, close; and the word *shelemot*, “whole” stones, from the word *shalom*, peace). Hence, he said, we have before us a logical deduction (*kal va-chomer*). If the altar, which can neither see nor hear nor speak, is spared the pain of a sharp metal tool because it enhances peace between Israel and its Father in Heaven, then certainly a human being who brings peace between man and his wife, between man and his fellow man, between city and city, between family and family, most certainly will be protected from any punishment and shielded against any weapons forged by the enemy.

Let all of us – religious and secularist, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, Diaspora and Israeli Jews – strive for the blessing of *shalom*, of peace both without and within, of reconciliation of one camp with the other, of community with community – but above all else, of nationality and religion, of the State of Israel with the Torah of Israel, of the people with God.

Having done that, having secured our inner integrity, we shall be safe from all dangers from without.

“May He who creates peace in His high place, create peace for us and for all of Israel, and let us say, Amen.”

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on this week’s sedra reading, Terumah, and the Torah portions that follow until the end of Exodus.

To understand the work, we have to look at the entirety of the book of Exodus. It can be divided into three distinct

sections: 1) chapters 1-15 tell the Israelite story from slavery to freedom, 2) chapters 16-24 tell the movement to and from Sinai and the giving of the law, and 3) chapters 25-40 list the instruction and execution of the Mishkan, our portable Temple in the wilderness. The order makes sense. First, we have a shared story of our anguish, God's salvation, and Moses' leadership. Without freedom, we cannot receive and observe the laws that unite us. Once we have laws, we move from a shared past to shared values and behaviors. Our shared history and values enable us to build a holy community; the Mishkan represents the centerpiece of the camp, literally and emotionally, as a way to access the sacred. We needed more than freedom. We needed transcendence.

And to achieve this as a community, we needed to build the Mishkan as a community. The Israelites were called upon to each contribute a half-shekel and to give the best of what they owned and their individual talents as artisans: "Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart is so moved" (Ex. 25:2). Everyone's heart, it seems, was so moved. But what can a rag-tag group of former slaves possibly have to contribute to the grandeur of the project? Certainly not the list of expected contributions:

And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair; tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood; oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastplate. (Ex. 25:3-7)

It is unclear what some of these Hebrew terms mean. But what is less clear is how any of the Israelites obtained precious metals, rare skins and expensive dyes. Rashi, who offers a definition of almost every item, shares no wisdom on where these came from. R. Abraham ibn Ezra suggests that some of these goods came into Israelite hands because the people were told three times to take dresses and finery from the Egyptians before they left. He also suggests that either Israelites planted acacia trees when they were in Egypt and took the wood with them or there was a forest of the acacia trees near Sinai.

Sforno suggests that only the gemstones that were described in Moses' instructions should be contributed. Other items were rejected. Underlying his reading may be the notion that people, in their generosity, want to give of themselves but often donate objects because they have

them and not because they are needed. The right way to give, suggests Sforno implicitly, is to understand first what the needs are.

However, the Israelites obtained these materials is secondary to the fact that giving something of value helped them value the Mishkan. All of this activity was to fulfill God's mandate: "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (25:8). Commentaries on this verse emphasize the second 'them' – when they build this portable sanctuary, God will live in the people rather than in the building. But the first them, I believe, explains the second. God will live in them because each one of them made a personal contribution to a joint project of holiness. As slaves, the Israelites were involved in building the edifices of the Egyptian empire. The back-breaking work did nothing to advance themselves as a people. Finally, they were able to build something extraordinary themselves.

This work was a labor of love. Avot de-Rebbi Natan, an ancient rabbinic collection of sayings, states: "A person should love work and not hate work. For just as the Torah was given in a covenant, so work was given in a covenant, as it says (Ex. 20:10): 'For six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Eternal your God'" (11:1). Work, according to this, should represent a fulfillment of our purpose on this earth. Just as the Sabbath is joyous and restorative, should the right work be purposeful and energizing.

To illustrate, the text continues with an example from the building of the Mishkan, According to Rabbi Natan, Moses led the building charge while his chiefs sat silently observing him and waiting for direction. Then, when they heard a call throughout the camp that the work was complete, they bemoaned the fact that they had made no contribution. This explains, according to Rabbi Natan, the verse "And the chiefs brought the shoham stones [for the breastplate of the high priest] (Ex. 35:27)." Of their own volition, they wanted to take part in the Mishkan's construction. No one wanted to be left out.

One of the most important functions leaders have is bringing people together, especially those with disparate interests and backgrounds, to work towards a common purpose using their God-given talents and motivating their participation. Leadership expert, Patrick Lencioni believes that such projects serve another function: they help minimize the differences that stymie people from getting the work done. In *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars: A*

Leadership Fable About Destroying the Barriers That Turn Colleagues Into Competitors, Lencioni identifies silos as barriers that exist within an organization that cause people who are “supposed to be on the same team to work against one another.” He blames leaders for this, saying that many executives fail to, “provide themselves and their employees with a compelling context for working together.” The consequences of siloed behavior are not insignificant; to Lencioni, they can create profound pain:

Silos—and the turf wars they enable—devastate organizations. They waste resources, kill productivity, and jeopardize the achievement of goals. But beyond all that, they exact a considerable human toll too. They cause frustration, stress, and disillusionment by forcing employees to fight bloody, unwinnable battles with people who should be their teammates. There is perhaps no greater cause of professional anxiety and exasperation—not to mention turnover—than employees having to fight with people in their own organization.

Does Anybody Know What Time It Is?

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

This week’s parsha begins with a commandment to collect funds from the people for the purpose of building a mishkan, or sanctuary. According to the Rambam, the essence of the mishkan was, as its name ‘mishkan ha-edus,’ or sanctuary of the testimony,’ implies, a place to house the luchos, or tablets, received at Sinai, containing the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments. According to the Ramban, the purpose of the sanctuary was to serve as a place for God’s presence to dwell among the people who would gather there, thus perpetuating the event that occurred at Mt. Sinai. There is a dispute among the commentators whether the command to build the mishkan was given to Moshe before the sin of the golden calf, or only afterwards. Rashi follows the opinion, found in Shemos Rabbah (33:1), and Midrash Tanchuma (Terumah, 8), that the command was given only after that sin, and that the mikdash was to serve as an atonement for it. Seforno, who follows this approach, actually writes that had it not been for the sin of the golden calf, there would not have been a need for the mishkan. Ramban, however, writes that the command was given to Moshe before the sin, and the sanctuary had an independent purpose, that had relevance even before the incident of worshipping the golden calf. That purpose, as we noted above, was to

Understandably and inevitably, this bleeds over into their personal lives, affecting family and friends in profound ways.

Lencioni suggests that the best way to bring people together is to create projects that everyone in a company or team can work on together for a limited period of time to connect the “company’s long-term vision ... to its short-term objectives.” The leader has to provide a unifying sense of purpose that highlights everyone’s contribution and gets people moving in the same direction.

Moses made this happen under God’s direction. Every person who labored in the construction of the Mishkan became one of its key stakeholders and felt a profound connection to it and to the God who would one day dwell in them. Community is formed ultimately by builders rather than buildings. Leaders lead best when they create a community of stakeholders.

So, what project can you create that will lower the barriers between people and create genuine stakeholders?

perpetuate the Sinai experience of the dwelling of God’s presence among the people.

According to Rashi, the command to build the mishkan is mentioned in the Torah out of sequence, while according to Ramban, it is mentioned in sequence. Ramban, in his explanation, is following his general approach that the Torah records the events in the sequence in which they occurred, unless there is a compelling reason to say otherwise. In this instance, according to the Ramban, there is actually a compelling reason to say that the events are recorded in sequence, since the previous parsha ended with a description of the events at Mt. Sinai, and the purpose of the mishkan, according to his understanding, is to perpetuate that event. Although the Midrash Rabbah and Midrash Tanchuma support Rashi’s approach, there is another midrash, the Tanna DeBei Eliyohu, which ostensibly seems to support the Ramban’s approach. That midrash says that the moment the Jews said, at Sinai, ‘we will do and we will listen’ (Shemos 24:7), as recorded at the end of parshas Mishpotim, God gave them the command of ‘and you shall take for a portion,’ for the purpose of building the mishkan, as recorded in the beginning of parshas Terumah. Since there is a midrash that seems to explain the events in sequence, even though

other midrashim explain the sequence differently, we need to understand why Rashi chose to follow those midrashim that explain them to be recorded out of sequence. I believe that, in fact, we can explain Rashi in a way by which the Tanna DeBei Eliyohu also follows his approach to the order of events, rather than the Ramban's approach.

Rashi explains the end of parshas Mishpotim to be out of sequence, and that the events described there actually occurred before the Torah was given. As we explained, Rashi understood, based on the midrash, that the beginning of the pasha includes a charge to delve into the mishpotim, the civil laws of the Torah, in a very thorough way. After the Torah mentions many of these laws, it then records the events that occurred before the Torah was given, and the people's statement of na'aseh venishma. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the Beis HaLevi, explained that this statement by the people implied that Torah study, besides acquainting one with the actual laws that must be followed, has an additional dimension of study for its own sake, which we explained to mean, as a means of connecting to God through understanding his wisdom. We may add that by connecting to God in this way, one is actually taken beyond the limitations of time and place, just as God is beyond time and place. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Boston, a great grandson of the Beis HaLevi, very movingly described how, when he immerses himself in a Talmudic passage, he senses the presence of Rashi, the Rambam, and others throughout the generations, and he also feels the presence of God, standing behind his shoulder and listening to what he is saying. Understanding Torah study in this way, we can now explain the Tanna DeBei Eliyohu in a different light.

According to halacha, the mishkan is in a different time zone than the outside world. Whereas, for all other halachic purposes, we consider the day as following the night, as we find in the creation of the world, in the mishkan and the Beis HaMikdash, the night is considered as following the day. I believe that one of the messages being conveyed here is that because the mishkan is the place where God's presence dwells, by connection to God, who is beyond time, we, too, are taken beyond the limitations of time. The author of the Sefer HaChinuch, in a lengthy exposition on the meaning of the mishkan, says that, on one level, the mishkan should lead a person to look beyond reward in this world for his good deeds, and focus more on the world to come, though it is even better

not to think of reward at all, and focus on the connection with God that can be achieved there. Here, too, we see the notion of being taken beyond time through connecting with God, Who is beyond time. Ideally, Torah study should have this kind of effect on us. Once the nation sinned at the incident of the golden calf, however, a mishkan was needed. However, the ideal remains to connect with God wherever we may be through the study of Torah.

Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, in fact, in his Asufos Ma'arochos to parshas Terumah, explains the prayer we say every day at the end of Shemoneh Esreh 'may it be Your will ... that the Temple be rebuilt, and that You grant us our portion in the Torah,' in this way. What, he asks, is the connection between the building of the Temple and God granting us our portion in Torah? Rav Goldvicht explains that the ideal of the Beis HaMikdash, which is forming a close connection with God, should really be attained wherever we are, through Torah study. The essence of our prayer, therefore, is that God grant us that close connection which is available in the Temple, through our Torah study, which follows us wherever we go. The existence of the Temple at such a time, he goes on to explain, serves the function of publicizing to the rest of the world the close connection that the Jewish people has with God on a constant basis.

Rashi, then, in explaining the record of events as being out of sequence, is connecting the declaration of 'we will do and we will listen,' which implies the transcendent nature of Torah study, with the command to build the mishkan, which is also of a transcendent nature. This too can be the meaning behind the Tanna DeBei Eliyohu, which connects the two. While the ideal would have been to reach this kind of connection with the transcendence of God through Torah study alone, God foresaw that the sin of the golden calf would make it difficult for the people to achieve this. Therefore, in Rabbeinu Bachya's words, He created the cure before the illness, and recorded the command to build the mishkan before recording the sin of the golden calf, which necessitated that command. Perhaps, then, because the Torah wishes to connect the timeless nature of Torah with the timeless nature of the mishkan, both the declaration of 'we will do and we will listen,' and the command to build the mishkan, are recorded out of order, since both Torah and the mishkan represent a transcendence of time.

Levels of Kedusha

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The mitzva of building the Mishkan dominates the second half of Sefer Shemos. The Mishkan was the place where Hashem's Shechina rested. Rashi and Ramban disagree about how to understand the timing of the events leading up to the commandment to build the Mishkan. Long before them, the Midrash and Zohar also took different perspectives.

According to the simple reading of the Torah, the mitzva to build the Mishkan was given right away at Har Sinai, the day that Moshe Rabbeinu concluded the bris to keep the Torah. This was most probably the same day that the Ten Commandments and Parshas Mishpatim were taught to Bnei Yisrael. Then the story of the eigel occurred, while Moshe was on top of Har Sinai. The aftermath of the eigel was followed by the people's punishment, Moshe's prayers on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, the resolution of that story, and then the renewal of the mitzva of building the Mishkan. This is the way the Ramban and Zohar understand the order of events.

Rashi, though, following the Midrash, invokes the rule of *ein mukdam u'me'uchar baTorah*, the Torah is not always in chronological order. Since we see the Torah spends so much time discussing the Mishkan again after the eigel, apparently the mitzva to build the Mishkan was given only after the eigel and after Moshe broke the luchos, punished the sinners, went back to Har Sinai, and prayed to Hashem for forgiveness for the Jewish People. After that reconciliation, Hashem gave the mitzva to build the Mishkan.

Mishkan Dimensions

The Shem Mishmuel presents an interesting analysis of this machlokes. He raises a question. With a careful reading of the parsha, the dimensions of the Mishkan do not compute. One of the keilim of the Mishkan could not actually fit into the building. Chazal say that the keruvim that Shlomo made were each 10 amos wide, yet the whole kodesh hakodashim was 20 x 20, so perforce the aron itself took up no space. Additionally, the Gemara teaches (Sota 35a) that each time the Jews moved and carried the pieces of the Mishkan with them, the aron was not actually carried. Instead, it carried the levi'im who "carried" it. In addition, the beams of the Mishkan were too numerous to all fit on the limited number of wagons they used. They

were more than 15 feet tall, and they must have weighed many tons. How could a few oxen on a few wagons carry all these beams? Clearly, we are dealing with something that did not work according to the regular laws of nature. The Mishkan was a miraculous construct even though it was based on physical dimensions.

How could Bnei Yisrael engender this kind of miraculous building to function with them in the desert? What merit did they have that enabled them to construct a physical building that broke through physical limitations? The Shem Mishmuel says that this was a result of the love of Bnei Yisrael for Hashem, as demonstrated by their boundless donations for the building of the Mishkan. They made all of their donations in a matter of days. They donated millions of shekalim worth of money, precious metals and stones, materials, textiles, and animal products. They were motivated by their immense love for Hashem. So, Hashem responded with His love—as if with a winking eye—making some of the features of the Mishkan miraculously fit despite the physical boundaries of the edifice.

Just like Bnei Yisrael went beyond normal efforts to build the Mishkan, Hashem went beyond the normal laws of nature to enable the Mishkan to function.

The Source of Bnei Yisrael's Appreciation

Where did this immense love Bnei Yisrael had come from? According to the Ramban and Zohar, this love came from Sinai. The experience of hearing the Ten Commandments and of feeling Hashem so close to them brought out an intense desire to be close to Him. Bnei Yisrael demonstrated their desire for closeness to Hashem in their response to the call for donations. They donated boundlessly and thereby achieved special closeness to Hashem and the ability to create a miraculous building.

In contrast, Rashi and the Midrash say that Bnei Yisrael achieved this tremendous love through the episode of the sin of the golden calf. Once Moshe came down from Har Sinai, destroyed the calf, punished the evildoers, and told them of the dire consequences, the bulk of the Jewish People experienced great feelings of regret. They desired to make amends for the sin of betraying the Almighty and not following the laws of idolatry so soon after Sinai. They did teshuva at the deepest level of their souls.

Chazal say that the crowns Moshe told the people to remove after the sin of the eigel had been given to them after they accepted the Torah (see Shabbos 88a). One crown made them invincible in battle, while the other protected them from the angel of death. After the sin, they voluntarily gave up their crowns, subjecting themselves to enemies and even to death. This level of repentance, accepting even death as punishment with the aim of reestablishing closeness to Hashem, created a tremendous yearning to do the will of God. Their teshuva aroused within them much more yearning for Hashem than they felt before the sin. The people gained greater desire, enthusiasm, and alacrity to reach out and grow closer to Hashem. Because of the eigel and their subsequent teshuva, they felt that only Hashem could redeem them. This motivated them to donate millions of shekalim in just a few days. This love is what produced the miraculous building of the Mishkan.

Two Mishkenos

The Shem Mishmuel says that, in fact, both ideas are correct. Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to build a Mishkan right after the Aseres Hadibros, as the simple reading indicates. This mitzva of building a Mishkan was commanded before the eigel, when Bnei Yisrael still had their crowns. In this state, the Mishkan was going to be an amazing spiritual edifice. All the gold and silver that would have been donated for the Mishkan would have been more spiritual than physical. It is hard to grasp this because we are living in a physical world, with sins. But for people who were like Adam and Chava before the sin, as Bnei Yisrael were after they received the Torah, the physical side was imbued with great spirituality. They were incredibly more spiritual relative to their physical aspect.

We see, for example, that Moshe was able to go forty days without food and water. He lived on his spirituality. There are stories of great tzaddikim who lived not long ago who barely ate.

There were some who barely ate except on Shabbos, like the Belzer Rebbe and the Baba Sali, who were alive only forty years ago. They were very spiritual people, and their physical side was a minor aspect of their personality. Eating wasn't that important to them.

According to the original mitzva to build the Mishkan, the Jewish People were going to build something so spiritual that the gold and silver would be physically reduced to nothing and would become spiritual in nature.

The building itself would have been fit for Adam and Chava before the sin.

But the Jewish People sinned. And when they sinned, the whole character of the mitzva changed. They lost their crowns, their immortality and invincibility. The struggle between good and evil became real again. The Mishkan that had to be built after the reconciliation needed more physicality than the original plan called for. This second Mishkan was still very spiritual, but it was more physical than in the original plan. In certain ways, its spirituality superseded physical limitations and laws, but it was nevertheless a primarily physical entity.

Different Levels of Kedusha—Moshe's Challenge

The Shem Mishmuel explains that holiness has many levels. The idea of becoming holy is the central motif and imperative of our Torah, as the pasuk states, "*Ki am kadosh atah*" (Devarim 14:2) and "*kedoshim tihyu*" (Vayikra 19:2). This agenda has many levels.

Clearly, a person like Moshe Rabbeinu was holy. His holiness surpassed the holiness that others can attain. He went to the top of Har Sinai, spent forty days without food or water, and communicated with Hashem. He went back a second time to pray for Bnei Yisrael, and a third time to receive the next set of luchos. For Moshe, what does the command of *kedoshim tihyu* mean?

The Shem Mishmuel says that kedusha means abstinence, to restrain oneself and thereby achieve closeness to Hashem. More specifically, kedusha means to give up something for Hashem.

What did Moshe Rabbeinu give up? Did he give up physical pleasures? This is a ridiculous concept to apply to such a great person. Moshe wasn't interested at all in physical pleasures. Every one of us has a certain degree of kedusha. Some of us have achieved certain levels of kedusha at which certain things don't even tempt us. How many of us feel a temptation to eat bacon? When we pass by McDonald's, we are not tempted. Do we fulfill *kedoshim tihyu* by not eating pig?

We may have other temptations, though, that are difficult for us. If someone insults us, do we answer back in kind? Do we talk badly about someone behind his back? These are the challenges of kedusha that we face at our level. We have to resist the temptation of *sinas chinam*. For us, sometimes it is difficult to be tolerant of others. But not eating treif is usually not a high-level fulfillment of *kedoshim tihyu* at all. Some people, though, who grew

up in a non-religious family may encounter a challenge when choosing to eat only kosher food. When becoming observant, it can be very hard to give up non-kosher food. This is their kedusha. Thus, kedusha is related to each person uniquely.

What was Moshe's kedusha? It wasn't money. After they crossed the Yam Suf, Bnei Yisrael stayed by the shore to gather all of the money and other valuables from the dead Egyptians. Moshe, however, didn't take anything. He was busy with the coffin of Yosef. He had no desire for money, just as we have no desire for non-kosher food.

Did Moshe want power? Moshe argued with Hashem for a week in an attempt to avoid becoming the leader of the Jews. So, what was Moshe's interest that he had to give up in order to become holy on his level, to achieve *kedoshim tihyu*?

Moshe indeed had a certain desire. He wanted to grow in his spirituality. He wanted to become closer to Hashem. No matter how close he was, he knew he could still come closer. He had a great desire to understand more of Hashem's nature and His ways of running the world. Moshe asked Hashem, "*Hodi'eni na es derachecha*. Let me know your ways" (Shemos 33:13). This was the arena in which his kedusha—his holy restraint—was to be expressed. Rashi (Shemos 19:14) says that when Moshe came down from Har Sinai, he went straight to the people. He did not deal with his own spiritual concerns, but only with the people's. Moshe turned away from his own spiritual dealings so that he could teach Bnei Yisrael the Torah, so that they would achieve their spiritual goals. Moshe decided to set his own personal spiritual advancement aside. He performed Hashem's will to help the Jewish People. He gave up his own desire for personal spiritual development in order to help others.

Holy Responsibilities to Others

We have responsibilities to other Jews, especially to our children and our friends. We also have a responsibility to ourselves and to Hashem to develop our own spiritual sides. As holy as Moshe would have become had he studied more Torah, he decided to put away his own desires. He had a responsibility to bring Torah to Am Yisrael. This was his principal mission. Moshe thus said, "My responsibility is to bring Hashem's word to Am Yisrael. This takes precedence over my own personal development."

There are many instances in which we, too, should put aside our own personal interests in order to bring Torah

to Am Yisrael. This especially applies to parents. Parents have many responsibilities, both to themselves and to their children. We should follow the model of Moshe. We should give precedence to the spiritual development of our family over our own personal development.

This is certainly more important than climbing the ladder of success or becoming rich, popular, or famous. The private platform of our family, of our spouse and children, must be our primary agenda—just as Moshe put aside his own warranted, personal holy needs to help Am Yisrael learn Torah. Each of us in our own way has to put aside our own personal development to help others who depend on us. This is the kedusha of Moshe.

My Rebbe, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik zt"l, once said something startling—that Moshe Rabbeinu even gave up the spiritual development of his own children for the sake of Bnei Yisrael. This prioritization was unique for Moshe in his special role. The average person, though, must put his children first. *Aniyei ircha kodmim l'aniyei ir acheres*, the needy of one's own city take precedence over the needy of another city—but *aniyei beischa* come even before that. Moshe was a special messenger from Hashem. Only he had to give up even his own family for Bnei Yisrael. No one else should do such a thing. One's own family precedes the needs of others. We must take care of our family, first and foremost. Each person has his or her kedusha, the sacrifice that only he or she can make to achieve his or her mission in life. For some of us, it is giving up physical pleasures. For others, it is passing up on the pursuit of wealth and fame. And for some of us, it is a spiritual price that must be paid in order to achieve greater good.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that kedusha is a function of each person at his or her own level, related to his or her own background and goals. Everybody is unique and has his or her own challenges. Each person must deal with the challenge at his or her level. My challenge is not your challenge, and my sacrifice is not your sacrifice. We each achieve kedusha in our own individual way. The result is that each of us has our own unique relationship with Hashem.

Uniquely Holy Times and Places

Just like kedusha has many different levels, the various times of the year have different kinds of kedusha. The days of the week, Rosh Chodesh, Yom Tov, Shabbos, and Yom Kippur—each of these kedushos is different. Kedusha is not an all-or-nothing concept. It is relative to different

people, times, and places.

The Shem Mishmuel explains in a special drasha that there are three levels of kedusha. We see these three kedushos in the Mishkan: there was the chatzeir, the outer courtyard; the kodesh, the first sanctuary; and the kodesh hakodashim, the inner sanctum of the Mishkan. These are the three levels of kedusha in the realm of place.

All Jews are allowed into the chatzeir, unless they are tamei. In the kodesh, which in the Beis Hamikdash was the ulam and heichal, only kohanim are permitted. The only person who enters the kodesh hakodashim is the kohen gadol. Here we find three levels of kedusha in people: 1) ordinary Jews, 2) kohanim, and 3) the kohen gadol.

We also find three kedushos in the realm of time. The three types of holiness in time are 1) Rosh Chodesh, 2) Yom Tov, and 3) Shabbos. Rosh Chodesh has greater kedusha than weekdays because of the special korbanos that are brought. It is like the chatzeir and parallels the ordinary Jew. Even though Rosh Chodesh is holier than regular weekdays, work is permitted. On Yom Tov, however, we can do only some melachos, the ones that have to do with food preparation. This parallels the kodesh and the kohen.

On Shabbos and Yom Kippur, even activities that have to do with preparing food are prohibited. These days parallel the kodesh hakodashim and the kohen gadol.

We thus have three levels of holiness in time that are similar to three types of holiness in place and people.

Uniquely Holy People

We also find varying levels of kedusha practices for regular Jewish People. There is one type of kedusha that everyone has to keep: we must all stay away from prohibited things such as sexual prohibitions, prohibited foods, and prohibited creative activities on Shabbos. This is a kedusha that is expected and demanded of every Jew. In the realms of time and place, this is parallel to Rosh Chodesh and the chatzeir.

The second level of holiness is kadeish atzmecha b'mutar lach, voluntary restraints. A person can eat as much (kosher) cake as he wants, but he can decide that he will eat only a certain number of pieces a week. Or he could limit the time he spends browsing the web. These are activities that may normally be permitted. But the person who makes these commitments wants to achieve kedusha in things that are permitted. This is like Yom Tov, the days on which we can do certain melachos while others are

forbidden. So too, we create kedusha in certain voluntary areas, but not always.

The third level of kedusha is related to the concept of *b'chol derachecha da'eihu*, restraint and holiness in all things. This is the level of the tzaddik, the righteous Jew, who with every fiber of his being feels that he is serving Hashem. This is the level of Shabbos and Yom Kippur, days on which we serve Hashem the entire time. This is the level of the tzaddik.

The various forms of the Mishkan also had different levels of kedusha. The mitzva of Mishkan that came right after the Ten Commandments was a very high-level, holy Mishkan. It was intended to be a building of almost pure spirit, like being in Gan Eden before the sin of the Eitz Hada'as. This high-level Mishkan came about due to the intense love and excitement to be the people of God. Then came the terrible sin of the eigel. The Mishkan was transformed into a more physical building. It was driven by feelings of repentance and a desire to come back to closeness with the Creator. This second Mishkan was to have less kedusha than the first one.

Two Ways of Getting Close to Hashem

The Shem Mishmuel explains that we have two motivations to get closer to Hashem. Sometimes, we feel inspired. We experience feelings of love and enthusiasm, and we marvel at Hashem's immense blessings in this great world and are grateful for the kindness He showers upon us in our lives. When we come to the Kotel, for example, we feel the intense pull of His love pouring out to us from the holy mountain, and we respond with intense love and desire. This is the level of the first Mishkan.

But sometimes we sin, and our sins separate us from Him. We feel heartbroken afterwards, and we feel that we need Him. We seek Him from the farthest distances of the world and feel that we cannot exist without Him. We are lost and need Hashem to bring us back. These feelings also bring us back to Hashem. These are the feelings of the second Mishkan, the Mishkan that was commanded after the eigel and the subsequent teshuva.

Two Kinds of Shabbos

This dichotomy is reminiscent of two ideas of Shabbos. In the first set of the Ten Commandments, the Torah uses the word zachor – remember and cherish the Shabbos. The parallel word shamor in the second set of luchos is negative, meaning “don't desecrate the Shabbos.” Zachor—love the Shabbos—was given to us in the first

commandments, written before the sin. It is the Shabbos of beauty and enjoyment, reveling in the beauty of the day. It is the Shabbos of inspiration.

The second set of luchos came after the eigel, after sin and repentance. There, the Torah uses the word shamor. We need the Shabbos to save us from sin, alienation, and isolation. We experience this aspect of Shabbos at night. As we leave the six days of the week when we can feel so distant from God, we need Shabbos to bring us back. Shabbos is a form of repentance. Shabbos is similar to the word teshuva in that both words have the letters shin, beis, and tav. Shabbos can also be understood as rashei teivos for Shabbos bo tashuv. This is the Shabbos of shamor, of the ba'al teshuva. This is the Shabbos of the Jew who flees the chol (secularity) of the week.

Then comes Shabbos day. It is a day of closeness to Hashem. We are ready then to come closer and closer to our beloved God. Shabbos day elevates us higher and higher until we reach the pinnacle of kedusha at shalosh se'udos as we eat and sing the zemiros at the climax of Shabbos. This resembles the Mishkan before the sin, the state of Adam before he ate from the Eitz Hada'as. This resembles the pre-eigel commandment of zachor. This is like the inner sanctum of the Mishkan, the kodesh hakodashim.

Why Wood It?

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Feb 27, 2020)

In this week's Parsha, the tzivui to build various keilim for the Mishkan includes the Aron, associated with the Luchos and Talmud Torah. And the pasuk adds *mi-bayis u'mi-chutz titzapenu*—you must gold-plate it inside and outside. So Chazal ask why it is the only kli to require an inner overlay—even if it will remain permanently unseen. What's the big deal? And Rava famously responds: Here we see that a Talmid Chacham who is not tocho kebaro—a hypocrite whose external presentation does not match his inner world—is not a proper Talmid Chacham. A Talmid Chacham and his Torah are only valid when what's on his inside matches the image he shows on the outside. That's why the hidden, invisible side of the Aron had to be made of gold.

A very delightful Sefer called *Yalkut Yehuda*, authored by Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg of Denver, Colorado,

Holy Vacillations

We all oscillate spiritually between closeness to Hashem and sinning. We then have to repent for our failures and sins. Our sins make us feel alienated and distant from our Creator. When we then seek Hashem with all of our being, we find Him. This is the Mishkan after the sin, which we should all have.

Sometimes, though, we are zocheh to find Hashem through ahava, through pure love and inspiration. When you stand on top of a mountain and see the view, you see God's handiwork. When you look at the sky, take in the stars, the work of His hands; when you stand on the beach and see the endless ocean, let yourself be inspired. Standing atop a mountain overlooking the city of Jerusalem, let the holy city bring inspiration into your heart.

The inspiration of Israel and Jerusalem, of Shabbos Kodesh and Yom Kippur, leads us to Gan Eden, to the Mishkan before the sin. This leads us to the ultimate kedusha, the holiness of Moshe Rabbeinu, of Adam and of Chava before the sin, and of Bnei Yisrael right after they received the Torah.

May we be zocheh to both kinds of Mishkan and Shabbos, to both kinds of closeness to Hashem, to both zachor and shamor.

poses an obvious question: if a Talmid Chacham must be a through-and-through real thing, then why is the Aron only plated with gold on the inside and outside, with wood in-between? Shouldn't a Talmid Chacham be entirely pure—the real thing all the way through? And Rav Ginsburg offers a wonderful explanation based on a popular adage: *Il meglio è l'inimico del bene* (Perfect is the enemy of good). If you set the bar too high—saying it must be one hundred percent or nothing—you will end up with nothing. Nobody is perfect. Someone might mistakenly think: if I want to be a Talmid Chacham—somebody special—I should be perfect. I must be all the way through. If I make any mistake in life, I'm not a real Talmid Chacham, and I should give up. Rav Ginsburg says no, *chas ve-shalom*, that is not a realistic expectation. No one says that a Talmid Chacham who is not pure gold is

not a Talmid Chacham. Everyone is a human being—no one is perfect. Chazal are not saying that if you try to live up to a certain standard, act a certain way, make a Kiddush Hashem, and try to act as you should, but you are flawed and sometimes mess up and don't live up to the ideal, then you are not a Talmid Chacham. No, that's the wood in the middle. And you are still a Talmid Chacham. What did Chazal mean? There is an outside and an inside. The inside is the deep inside—the deepest recesses of your heart. Do you genuinely want to do the right thing? Do you really want to come close to Hashem? Do you want ruchnius? If you answered yes, and you act on your outermost layer like a Talmid Chacham, then you are the real thing. Do you ever mess up in-between? Do you sometimes not live up to your ideals because you are only a human being? Do you sometimes do something that a Talmid Chacham shouldn't? That is why we should always strive to be better. But meanwhile, you are still a Talmid Chacham. It doesn't mean you must be perfect to be a Talmid Chacham. Just the deepest desire of your heart ought to be true. If deep

in your heart, you don't care, then you are a hypocrite, and you should stop pretending on the outside. But if the deepest part of your heart is in there, and on the outside, you try to act appropriately, then the fact that sometimes, someplace in the middle, you mess up and don't always live up to your ideals—whether anyone is looking or not—you are still a Talmid Chacham and should strive to be better. Rav Ginsburg quotes, *be-derech drush*, the question of the Ba'alei Tosofos on Chumash, who ask: why does the Aron have wood on the inside if the Talmid Chacham needs to be pure gold? They give a more technical answer. If it was all gold, it would be too heavy to carry. Therefore, Rav Ginsburg says, that's exactly my point. If you say that you must be all gold all the time, that's too heavy a burden to carry, and no one will ever be a Talmid Chacham. You just need to make sure that your inside is right and try your best on the outside. And meanwhile you will grow more and more in-between; however, you are still a real Talmid Chacham. Shabbat Shalom.

From Mishkan to Beis Knesses

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Terumah, we are introduced to the Mishkan, the (portable) Sanctuary that the nation built in the desert. The keilim (vessels) of the Mishkan included the copper laver for the kohanim's washing of hands and feet before service, the copper altar for animal sacrifices, the golden altar for the daily incense offerings, the golden table which housed the show bread, the golden menorah which was lit every evening, as well as the holy ark in the Holy of Holies, where the Divine Presence rested (keviyachol). Each of the keilim were beautiful, intricate and precise in design and structure, and sanctified for the Divine service for which it was created. It was here, in the Mishkan, that one could come to find the holiness of the Shechina, to connect with the kohanim, and to find refuge and tranquility in its holy space. And what was the end goal of the Mishkan, of this hallowed, sanctified space? *וַתֵּשֶׁב לִי, מִקִּדְשׁ; וְשָׁכַנְתִּי, בְּתוֹכָם - and they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell within them and amongst them* (Shemos 25:8).

The Mishkan was the precursor to the Batei Mikdash that would eventually be built in Jerusalem, where the nation would ascend three times a year to celebrate the

Three Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succos, and around which Jewish life revolved during Temple times, under independent Jewish commonwealths. The first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and the second was destroyed in 70 CE by the Romans. Alas, almost 2,000 years later, we remain exiled, and the makom Mikdash (place where the Temples stood) remains in ruins; *עַל הַר - צִיּוֹן שָׁשָׁמָּה, שׁוֹעֲרִים הַלְכוּ-בוּ - upon Mt. Zion, which is desolate, foxes prowl there* (Eichah 5:18).

What, then has been the unifying, central place that has kept our people intact throughout our long exile and dispersion, has allowed for communities to thrive, established connections between Jews and their leaders, and perpetuated the dual mesoros of Torah and Tefillah?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l writes, "It is hard to understand the depth of the crisis into which the destruction of the first Temple plunged the Jewish people. Their very existence was predicated on a relationship with G-d symbolised by the worship that took place daily in Jerusalem. With the Babylonian conquest in 586 BCE, Jews lost not only their land and sovereignty. In losing the Temple, it was as if they had lost hope itself. For their hope

lay in G-d, and how could they turn to G-d if the very place where they served Him was in ruins?

“The Temple no longer stood, but its memory remained, and this memory was strong enough to bring Jews together in collective worship. In exile, in Babylon, Jews began to gather to expound Torah, articulate a collective hope of return, and recall the Temple and its service... A radically new institution was formed, and it eventually became known as the Beit Knesset (the synagogue).

“The synagogue is one of the most remarkable examples of an ‘awakening from below.’ It came into being not through words spoken by G-d to Israel, but by words spoken by Israel to G-d. There is no synagogue in Tanach, no command to build local houses of prayer...

“The synagogue became Jerusalem in exile, the home of the Jewish heart. It is the ultimate expression of monotheism - that wherever we gather to turn our hearts towards heaven, there the Divine Presence can be found, for G-d is everywhere. Where did this world-changing idea come from? It did not originate with the Temple, but rather from a much earlier institution: the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. It was portable, made of beams and hangings that could be dismantled and carried from place to place. But the Tabernacle, though a temporary structure, ultimately had permanent influence, whereas the Temple, intended to be permanent, proved to be temporary - until, as we pray daily, it is rebuilt.

“However, more magnificent than the physical structure of the Tabernacle was its metaphysical structure. The very idea that one can build a home for G-d seems absurd... The answer lies in this week’s parsha: They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell within them. (Ex.25:8)... The Divine Presence lives not in a building but in its builders; not in a physical place but in the human heart... The essence of ‘the holy’ is that it is a place where

we set aside all human devices and desires and enter a domain wholly set aside for G-d.

“If the concept of Mishkan is that G-d lives in the human heart, then its physical location becomes irrelevant. Thus the way was open, seven centuries later, to the establishment of the synagogue: if G-d is everywhere, He can be reached anywhere. More than any other, it is the institution of the synagogue - the Beit Knesset - that kept the Jewish people alive through almost 2,000 years of dispersion - the longest of all journeys through the wilderness” (*Covenant & Conversation, Exodus*, p.189-192).

It is compelling to note that when Esther orders Mordechai to gather the Jews of Shushan, as she prepares to go to King Achashveirosh and plead for the life of her nation, Esther sends a message to Mordechai: לְךָ כְּנוּס אֶת-כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן, וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְעַל-הָאֲבָלֹתַי וְעַל-הַשָּׂתָי אֶת-כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן, וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְעַל-הָאֲבָלֹתַי וְעַל-הַשָּׂתָי, *go and gather all the Jews that are found in Shushan, and fast for me, do not eat and do not drink for three days, night and day, me and my maidens will fast as well* (Esther 4:16). Gather together, in a place of gathering, Esther commands, unite in fasting, sackcloth and prayer, and let us gather together to accrue merits in our favor.

The Beit Knesses, lit. House of Gathering, is a holy abode where we gather together in worship of G-d, and the Divine Presence, in response to our service, comes down (keviyachol) to join us. Only when all Jews gather together, united in our shared destiny and common journey, will we merit the ultimate redemption and revelation. As the prayers of the Jews of Shushan were answered in response to their repentance, prayer and *kenisi’ah* (gathering), may we merit that our tefilos be answered, as we revere the Beis Knesses, while we yet long for the redemption and Binyan Bayis Shlishi, may it be immediate and in our days.

Do Non-Israeli Jews Have a Say in Israeli Politics

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Judaism has a rich and storied tradition of philanthropy. As people of moral spirit, we venerate acts of charity and personal generosity. Avraham, the founder of our people demonstrated his generosity and his gemilut chasadim by enthusiastically welcoming three complete strangers into his home, days after undergoing excruciating surgery. Charity and chesed became part

of our collective Jewish legacy. The gemara in Yevamot cautions us to inspect the Jewish pedigree of a miserly person who doesn’t display sympathy or kindness. If that person were Jewish, they would, obviously, be more generous and openhearted. Charity and tzedakah lie at the heart of Jewish identity.

In addition to providing charity for individuals, Jews

have always donated to large and great projects. Our philanthropic tradition began in the desert as we assembled the mishkan. Hashem had already performed numerous jaw-dropping miracles and could easily have deposited a heavenly temple in the desert. Yet, He preferred that we donate the various materials and personally perform the labor necessary for His temple. Work and labor are ennobling and purged us of the moral decay caused by the worship of the egel. More importantly though, donating to this great cause would transform us into agents of this divine project, granting us personal shares in the house of Hashem. Through our philanthropy we become more invested in important projects and idealistic missions. Philanthropy affords grants personal agency.

Ironically, our long-suffering exile reinforced the centrality of Jewish philanthropy. Constantly living as outsiders in foreign lands, we rarely received local governmental funding for religious services. We were forced to provide our own communal and religious needs through internal contributions. This codependency created tighter and more durable communities and, additionally, networked Jews across the diaspora, as often, wealthier communities supported poorer ones. As Jewish donations crisscrossed the globe, scattered Jewish communities remained united.

The Haluka system

Gradually, as we began to return to our homeland, philanthropy was channeled to Jews living under the harsh and unforgiving financial conditions in Palestine. In the late 18th and 19th century, Jewish emigration to Israel slowly expanded, and a process of financial support known as the chaluka system became institutionalized. In almost every European Jewish city, funds were collected for the old yishuv (generally referring to Jews who emigrated prior to 1880s) who had little financial means to support themselves.

The chaluka system figured prominently in the notorious incarceration of the first Lubavitcher Rebbe. Living in Liadi, in White Russia, Rav Shneur Zalman, the first Rebbe supervised the collection and allocation of funds to Chassidim in Palestine, which was then governed by the Ottoman empire, the sworn enemies of the Russian monarchy. He was arrested and imprisoned on trumped up charges of treason for transferring currency to an enemy of the state. These charges were exaggerated by opponents of Chassidism who incited local Russian authorities against

the Rabbi. After 53 days of imprisonment, on the 19th of Kislev, the Rebbe was liberated from prison, transforming this day into the major holiday of Chassidut. For 150 years, beginning with the late 18th century, the chaluka system was an integral part of Jewish communal life in Europe.

This distribution system became far more complicated in the 20th century in the aftermath of the financial collapse during WWI. Financially challenged Eastern European Jewish communities struggled to support an ever-growing Jewish population in Palestine. The chaluka system was first conceived in the late 18th century to support select Jewish pilgrims who abandoned the “good life” in Europe for a noble life of holiness and hardship in the land of our ancestors. By the early 20th century, the Jewish population in Palestine had expanded, and not everyone was living a holy life worthy of financial support from mother communities in Europe. The chaluka allocations slowly dwindled, coming to a complete and abrupt halt during the Holocaust.

In the desert Jewish philanthropy had raised a mishkan for Hashem. Thousands of years later, in the leadup to modern state, Jewish philanthropy provided a platform for the first returning Jews. Jewish philanthropy would have a further say in shaping Jewish destiny.

Philanthropy and the Modern State of Israel

As the state of Israel was declared, Jewish philanthropy quickly shifted gears. A newly formed nation, financially fledgling and militarily challenged required substantial material support. Though much of this support flowed from foreign governments, much came from personal philanthropic donations of Jews pouring in from across the globe. The 20th century witnessed the greatest philanthropic project the history of mankind. Jewish money helped build our national infrastructure, advance our communities, and restore our natural landscapes and forests. Jewish return to Israel became a global Jewish project.

Aliyah to Israel has always been a complex equation. Those who live in Israel don't always appreciate how difficult it can be. Not everyone can pick up and immediately relocate to Israel. Jewish philanthropy provided a means for Jews who don't yet live in our national homeland to still be part of this grand project of national regeneration. We wait for every Jew to return home, but until that day and given the fact that not every Jew has returned, we acknowledge the power of philanthropy to allow membership in this lofty historical project.

Newark, Amsterdam, and Gush

I teach in a hesder yeshiva in Gush Etzion which has a majestic campus which includes marble floors, a vaulted ceiling in a regal Beit Midrash, a campus surrounded by rolling gardens, and a stately waterfall at its entrance. Aesthetically outstanding, its beauty reflects the grandeur of religion.

Our beautiful campus was constructed in the mid 1970's with funds donated by the Jewish community of Newark, New Jersey, which had recently closed its doors. After closing its synagogue, the community donated its leftover funds to a fledgling yeshiva in the West bank operating out of an old Jordanian army barrack. Often, as I stroll through the magnificent campus financed by an American Jewish community of the previous generation, I reflect upon the marvel of Jewish continuity.

Additionally, our spacious library contains a section of older books donated by a four-hundred-year old Dutch Jewish community, which was unable to survive after the Holocaust. As I leaf through the 500-year old seforim in this collection, I ponder the different roads of Jewish

history. All roads lead home. Modern Jewish philanthropy for the state of Israel has empowered Jews across the globe to be part of the reawakening of

“And So Shall You Upgrade”

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The action begins right from the start of our parshah, as Hashem commands Moshe to collect materials for the Mishkan. After presenting the shopping list, Hashem tells Moshe, “And they shall make a Mikdash for Me, and I will dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you, the form of the Mishkan and the form of all of its implements, and so shall you do.” (Shemot 25:89) But the last phrase seems redundant; what does “and so shall you do” add?

The Talmud (Shevuot 14b-15a) explains that this means the Mishkan's instructions apply “for all generations.” As Rashi expands, “If one of the implements is lost, or when you want to make an implement for the Beit haMikdash, like the tables, menorot, sinks and [their] bases that Solomon made, make them according to this form.” (Commentary to Shemot 25:9) From this text it seems that the Beit haMikdash should have been a clone of the Mishkan.

But as Ramban (ad loc.) notes, the Beit haMikdash

history. It has also preserved the memories of past Jewish communities in our ancient homeland.

Partners Have a Voice

This partnership between Israel and Jews who live outside our country raises a very delicate and complex question. Should non-Israelis Jews enjoy a voice in determining Israeli politics and policies. Many Israelis chafe at the notion that our democracy should be compromised by opinions of non-voting and non-army serving citizens. But that is just the point: we aren't a pureblooded democracy, but a historical project built upon democratic foundations. Every Jew is expected to participate in this project and every Jew the right to voice their opinion about our joint project. It is certainly true that non-residents may not appreciate the more nuanced factors which should govern our policy decisions. For non-Israeli, issues in Israel always seem more black and white and more binary. Residents of Israel have a finer appreciation of the subtle complexities of our situation and their positions tend to be more balanced and judicious. However, fundamentally, every Jew is part of this process, and their philanthropy gives them a seat at the table of history. We are in this together.

was decidedly not a clone of the Mishkan. King Solomon deviated in building the Beit haMikdash; for example, he altered the size of the altar and he added keruvim, tables and menorot! (Melachim I 67) Indeed, Ramban rejects the cloning idea altogether, but most commentators harmonize the cloning vision and deviant reality by suggesting that King Solomon's changes came to him via a prophecy. [See Divrei Dovid, Or haChaim and Torat Moshe, all based on Divrei haYamim I 28:1119 and Midrash Shemuel 15:3.]

This approach justifies the changes, but it leads to a greater question. If Hashem wanted the Jews to clone the Mishkan, then why send a prophecy to change the plans for the Beit haMikdash?

Our Sages have suggested that each of King Solomon's changes served a particular purpose. For example:

- Creating ten tables, instead of one “*And he made ten tables' to increase their produce. Why did Moshe make only one? Because they did not need much produce in the*

wilderness.” (Otzar Midrashim pg. 476)

- A larger structure, made of stone and wood – “Solomon worked hard to construct the House in a marvelous way, whether in terms of the stones, which were large and valuable... or in terms of the wood, cedar wood which would never rot. All of this was so that these would endure as long as the heavens are above the earth.” (Abarbanel to Melachim I 6:11)
- Adding two keruvim which faced partially away from each other – “The generation of the wilderness, who merited to eat of the celestial table... were not called ‘performing Hashem’s will’ unless they looked heavenward fully... But in the days of Solomon, the masses of Israel needed and were required to incline a bit to the side to pursue a livelihood ... They set up the keruvim according to their performance of the Divine will, their faces angled

away a bit.” (Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Nefesh haChaim 1:89)

These changes demonstrate concretely something that we naturally suspect: We need to update our approach to serving Hashem from time to time, taking into account our evolving reality.

Of course, King Solomon had the advantage of a prophecy. Without that, our options for change are limited. Still, we can add personal prayers for changing needs, like King Solomon’s extra tables. When our personal wealth improves, we can also upgrade the trappings of our prayer – clothing, siddur, space – as King Solomon upgraded the Beit haMikdash. And we need to find ways to serve Hashem in both our spiritual and material existences as fits each of them, like the new keruvim. So did King Solomon upgrade – and so shall we upgrade throughout our generations.

Identifying the Essentials of Life

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat Terumah, is the first of four parashiot: Terumah, Tetzaveh, Vayakhel, Pekudei, along with part of parashat Kee Tisah, that concern the building of the מִשְׁכַּן, the Tabernacle, and its furnishings.

In a leap year, an additional month of Adar, Adar II, is added to the Hebrew calendar, resulting in extra Shabbatot. Consequently, each of the five parashiot are read individually on its own Shabbat. In most years, however, some of these parashiot are doubled up and read on a single Shabbat, sparing the congregants the “agony” of having to review the many minute details concerning the construction and furnishings of the Mishkan for five full weeks.

This year, the final two parashiot, Vayakhel and Pekudei, will be doubled up. As we read the details of the Mishkan for “only” four weeks this year, bear in mind the well-known adage, that “G-d is in the details.” We must, therefore, always be grateful to have the opportunity to review and analyze the edifying features, and the many fascinating “secret” details and profound messages, that the Tabernacle and its construction have to convey and teach.

Over the millennia, the Tabernacle has been studied and analyzed from many angles and perspectives. Contrary to common perception, there is much that we have learned, and continue to learn, from the Tabernacle that is relevant for all times, even contemporary times.

Among the most insightful reflections regarding the Tabernacle, are those of Moses Mendelssohn, who analyzed the various aspects of the Tabernacle from both political and moral perspectives. Mendelssohn points out that the building of the Tabernacle invokes the full array of human creativity, craftsmanship and skills. Without these skills, no community can exist or survive. Mendelssohn cogently classifies these skills into three categories:

1. Essential Arts: These skills pertain to the obtaining or manufacturing of food, clothing and shelter, and are elementary requirements for the pursuit of happiness, even on a most modest level.
2. Useful Arts: This involves the construction of roads, bridges, and the practice of metal craftsmanship that is necessary in the manufacture of utensils and other metal implements.
3. Ornamental Arts: These are distinguished by the use of arts and crafts that enhance our lives with beauty and the appreciation of the finer things in life.

Let us explore these three categories in greater detail.

Things that are necessary for survival are referred to by Mendelssohn as the “essential arts.” These were represented in the building of the Tabernacle by the priestly duties associated with the sacrificial rite. Since most sacrifices were eaten, this reflects the most basic need for human survival--food. Bezalel, the architect of the Tabernacle,

and Oholiav, his assistant, were also involved in the manufacture of clothing for the priests who served in the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle itself was a structure made of wooden columns covered by layers of various skins, thus representative of shelter. There is no question that for any society to survive, it must master the art of providing these essential needs, food, clothing and shelter, for its members.

Any society that hopes to advance economically and flourish, must develop the so-called “useful arts,”--which is, in essence, the “art” of streamlining life. Many of these elements are often taken for granted, such as the wheel, the knife and the fork. These revolutionary inventions allow society to not only endure, but to flourish, and to eventually develop well beyond the essence of basic survival. As a result of the benefits of the “useful arts,” we are now able to travel considerable distances. We are now able to manufacture much more durable items, such as pots and pans, bows and arrows, bridges and roads. We are no longer merely subsisting, we are enhancing creature comfort to the next very-important level.

The third level of craftsmanship called by Mendelssohn “ornamental arts,” raises society to even greater, and in many cases, unanticipated heights. We are no longer referring to things that are necessary for survival, or things that make life easier, such as a wheel or a fork. We refer to those things that enhance our lives with beauty, that introduce a sense of the aesthetic into our lives. It is reflected best in song, music, dance, poetry, theater, opera, fine arts and painting.

It is perhaps in the area of the ornamental arts that we confront the most mesmerizing and seductive of all elements of workmanship, and yet the most dangerous. The purpose of building the Tabernacle is to inspire the People of Israel to work toward contributing to the common human good and to provide the necessities that are required to ensure a productive and thriving nation.

And yet, how do we ensure that we not go beyond the limits of temperance? This same fundamental question is the one we face regularly in contemporary times. Can we justify spending millions of dollars on the production of a Broadway play as long as there is a single starving person in the city? Can we justify the production and sale of one piece of art, as long as there is a child stricken with a life-threatening disease who awaits a cure? In effect, how do we balance the needs of the essential and the useful, with the ornamental and aesthetic?

Judaism promotes the concept and practice of *הדרת המצוה* (glorifying a mitzvah)—such as buying a beautiful etrog, decorating a sukkah, buying a beautiful Chanukah menorah and Shabbat candlesticks, enhancing the Shabbat and holiday table with fine linen and beautiful tableware. All this is done in the name of *hidur mitzvah*--of enhancing the beauty of the mitzvah, which of course, is meant to further enhance the Name of G-d.

Can Judaism’s emphasis on aesthetics and beauty be justified simply because it is done for the sake of Heaven? But, perhaps the issue is more complex. Perhaps it’s not merely doing something for the sake of Heaven that justifies the extra effort and expenditure, but rather, it is that when doing something for the sake of Heaven, people suddenly realize that the bottom line of all of Jewish practice and ritual is the sanctity of human life and its enhancement.

Through the building of the Tabernacle, and by including all three skills/elements of life, we learn how G-d-directed all our efforts must be, that what might seem frivolous, such as concertizing, can become a critically important revenue-raiser to be used for the benefit of physically-challenged children or families in need. By providing ornamental pleasures and constructive entertainment, we can reduce stress, and make medical research in pursuit of cures more effective. In other words, as long as our deeds are *l’shaym shamayim*, for “the sake of Heaven,” they may be justified.

B.S. Jacobson in his book, *Meditations on the Torah*, (Sinai Publishing, 1977) cogently sums up the dangers of losing proper perspective. Referring to the essential, useful and ornamental arts, Jacobson writes:

All these works now contribute toward the common weal and the national good, as long as they are kept within the limits of temperance. However, if they yield to luxury--they become definitely harmful. A luxurious trend in ornamental arts will doom national happiness, as it will cause indulgence, conspicuous consumption, and predatory interest, which in turn will lead to envy, social tension, competitive and aggressive spirit, and, ultimately, to factionalism and class struggle, resulting in upheaval, disorder and corruption, and national disaster. (p.112)

If our goal is to build a “Tabernacle” (a holy home) utilizing these skills, arts and workmanship, then our efforts will surely be blessed. Otherwise, our efforts will be of no lasting benefit or value.