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Vayakhel-Pekudei 5783

This Month – And Every Month

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered March 31, 1962)

It is appropriate on Parshat Ha-Chodesh to recall that the Jewish calendar is based upon the lunar year. By this we mean, that each month begins with the birth of the new moon; rosh chodesh, “the first day of the new month,” commences with the appearance of the first sliver of the new moon. No wonder that the Hebrew word for month is *chodesh*, which derives from the Hebrew *chadash*, which means “new.”

Because the length of the revolution of the moon around the earth is not a full number of days, an integer, but a fraction – a little over 29.5 days – therefore the length of each individual month varies; sometimes the month is thirty days (called *malei*, or full) or twenty-nine days (called *chaser*, or incomplete.) Today if we want to know on what day rosh chodesh falls, whether the month is *malei* (thirty days) or *chaser* (twenty-nine days), our task is very simple: we refer to the Jewish calendar which is based upon very precise astronomic calculations. When we sanctify the new month in this manner, this is called *kiddush al yedei cheshbon* – sanctification based upon calculation. It is scientifically precise and contains no errors or doubts whatsoever.

But the original method for sanctifying the new month, the one practiced in the days of the Bible and during the time of the Temple, was not sanctification by calculation but rather *kiddush al yedei re'iyah* – sanctification by observation. There was an elaborate ritual prescribed and followed for the sanctification of the new month by visual observation. Two valid witnesses had to observe the birth of a new moon. They had to testify before a competent court of three expert judges who examined the witnesses carefully and, if they were satisfied with the veracity of the two people, would join in a rising declaration that the month was *mekudash*, sanctified. Then messengers would

bring the news to the outlying areas, informing them of the length of the past month and what day must be observed as rosh chodesh.

Some people have mistakenly assumed that in ancient days *kiddush al yedei re'iyah* was practiced because our ancestors were ignorant of the intricate *cheshbon* or precise calculations upon which a correct calendar must be based. The implication is, that if our ancestors had known the proper *cheshbon*, they could have dispensed with what seems, in retrospect, to have been a crude method of arranging the calendar: *re'iyah*, visual observation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, in a brilliant passage, points out that this notion is utterly absurd. It is obvious that our ancestors always knew the correct calculation of a Jewish calendar. After all, in Palestine during the rainy season it happened often that it was cloudy for several weeks on end. Does this mean that the month lasted for seven or eight weeks? Furthermore, the Sanhedrin would always be prepared to sit in session and await the arrival of witnesses. How did they know when to anticipate this event? Even better proof is the famous passage in the Bible, when David speaks to Jonathan and says, “behold *machar chodesh* – tomorrow is the beginning of a new month.” How did he know that the day following would be rosh chodesh, unless the calculations were widely known at that time?

But if we did know the calendar, then we ought to ask: why was it necessary to resort to *kiddush al yedei re'iyah* if the techniques of *kiddush al yedei cheshbon* were readily available? Why the uncertainties of visual observation, when you have accessible the precise mathematical calculations?

And the answer that Hirsch offers reveals the profundity and the humaneness of the Jewish tradition. It is, that

kiddush al yedei cheshbon is a purely mechanical act, and Judaism discouraged the mechanical and the impersonal, except as a last resort – such as the destruction of the Temple and Sanhedrin, and hence the impossibility of *kiddush al yedei re'iyah*. Sanctification through *re'iyah* raises the whole calendar, all the holidays and all of Jewish life, from a purely mathematical, mechanical, natural fact to a deeply human encounter, an intensely personal process of the visual observations of nature, of the growing moon, of reporting that event to human judges, and their declarations on behalf of a human community as to how and when Time is to be sanctified. Thus, Judaism raised the whole year and all its observances and sacred events from the realm of the impersonal to that of the personal, from mute nature to a human-social act. By insisting upon *kiddush al yedei re'iyah*, although the processes of *cheshbon* were very well known, the Torah taught us that the month, the year, all of life are not predetermined natural facts dependent only upon the conjunction of moon and sun, but that they are to be declared *mekudash* by man, by flesh and blood. Human effort can decide and declare whether a month is *malei* or *chaser*, and when rosh chodesh is to be celebrated.

So that when *kiddush al yedei re'iyah* was abandoned because of the destruction of the Temple and the Sanhedrin, it was regarded as a national tragedy. For the role of man was reduced, and a new dehumanization and depersonalization prevailed.

When therefore we read this morning of *parshat ha-chodesh* about the sanctification of the new moon through the process of *re'iyah*, we reaffirm our allegiance to the idea that observation must take precedence over calculation, man over machine, spirit over science, and humanity over nature; that each of us, rather than yield the integrity of his personality to an I.B.M. world, reaffirm “I will be a man in the world,” I will assert the *tzelleh Elohim*, the image of G-d in which I was created. We declare our consent to the interpretation of the Rabbis who, expanding on the biblical verse *ha-chodesh ha-zeh lakhem* (this month is unto you), declared: *mesurah be'yedkhem* – it is put into your hands.

Today, one of the inherent evils of our civilization is its bland impersonality. We have come to view employers or employees, competitors or colleagues, our husbands or our wives - even our very selves - not as pulsating, ineffably precious human beings, but as objects, things, devoid of uniqueness. In the words of a modern philosopher, we

have come to view each other and ourselves as an “it” not a “thou.” As a result - we have come to believe that man as such is expendable.

One of the supposedly remarkable results of the recent orbital flight of Col. Glenn was the fact that a human astronaut is still necessary, that better results are obtained with a man at the controls than with a complicated computer in the pilot seat. It occasioned great surprise. We were amazed to learn that man is not yet completely obsolescent: How surprising – man is really not superfluous: Automation is another example, despite the fact that it is a symbol of great scientific progress and even holds forth the promise of great economic opportunities, it is another move in the direction of the eclipse of human beings, of *re'iyah* giving way to *cheshbon*. Or take the recent report that some engineers have designed a computer which can compose original music. Maybe some people were thrilled by this news. I felt that we human beings had thereby pushed ourselves down another run into oblivion as a result of this displacement of a beautiful, creative human act by a mechanical process of a giant computer.

We have not yet learned to retain the magic and the charm of personality in an increasingly mechanized world. No wonder that so many of us moderns in the great cities of our country suffer from psychiatric illness. I have no doubt that this factor of impersonality is a strong contributing factor to the distressing statistics we recently read of, in which it was revealed that 80% of the population of our city is psychologically unhealthy.

Indeed, individual men have become expendable. We have become hardened to the death of individuals by the atrocious figure of eighteen-million victims in World War II. So we now talk and write about the possibilities of World War III, the Nuclear War, and have coined such words as “overkill” in which we indifferently estimate the murder, by nuclear blasts, of millions of people.

Social philosophers of our day have pointed to a gruesome phenomenon: a good-hearted citizen walking in the street will notice another man, a stranger, suddenly clutch at his heart and fall to the ground. Once upon a time, the onlooker's reaction would have been immediate and spontaneous: run over and help. Today – how dreadful to have to say it! – all too often our good-hearted citizen will ignore his fellow man, and merely walk away. He will ask himself: why get involved? Why make trouble for myself? And then he will rationalize: the man was probably

drunk anyway.

We have not only failed to observe the moon; we have failed to look into the hearts of our fellow men. We have closed our eyes not only to nature but also to humanity. Our lives have become dominated by impersonalities. We have immersed ourselves in all kinds of intricate *cheshbon* – except, of course, *cheshbon ha-nefesh*...

We should be happy, therefore, to witness the public expression of revulsion and disgust that swept across our nation this week against the whole system of institutionalized barbarism and official savagery called “prize fighting.” If our society will have enough courage to outlaw this legalized manslaughter instead of just appointing another investigating commission, it will prove that we have left within us at least some residual *kiddush al yedei re’iyah*, that all is not a matter of the *cheshbon* of dollars and cents.

I believe that this idea may be the explanation of an unusual story recorded in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 146b). It is told by R. Elazar b. Arakh, one of the greatest teachers of Judaism of all generations, that at one point in his life he decided to leave the great Academy at Yavneh and make his way to two communities which were very well known in those days, and for many centuries before, for their *yayin yashan*, their exquisite old wines, and *makom yafeh u-mayim na’im* – beautiful spots with abundant lakes and wells of sparkling water. It was these two resort areas, the Talmud tells us parenthetically, that had led astray the ten lost tribes of Israel in the days of old. The Rabbi settled there, and before long he began to follow the new style of life completely. And soon - he forgot all his learning. One day he returned by chance to a Jewish community, and was honored with the reading of the Torah on the Sabbath. It was a Sabbath on which was read the special portion we have read this morning. And when R. Elazar b. Arakh ascended the pulpit and opened the Torah, he saw the words *ha-chodesh ha-zeh lakhem* (this month is unto you). But he was no longer able to read simple Hebrew without atrocious errors. And so in each word he mistook one letter for another letter which looked much like it. And instead of *ha-chodesh ha-zeh lakhem*, he read *ha-cheresh hayah libam* – which means “their heart was mute!”

What a remarkable story! This man was the greatest student of R. Yochanan b. Zakkai, the one who kept Judaism alive at the most critical juncture in all of Jewish history. Does it mean that R. Elazar b. Arakh simply

abandoned all his Jewishness?

Of course not. I have no doubt that even while disporting himself in those pleasure spots of ancient Judea he sent his annual check to the Academy at Yavneh, his old Alma Mater. But he did not study by himself... I have no doubt that he provided for poor Galileans and contributed to the hospitals of Judea – but probably said: “Gentleman, I will give you all the money you want – but don’t get me involved in meetings.” R. Elazar b. Arakh was still a good Jew – but he tried to be Jewish vicariously, without personal involvement. He attempted the process of sanctifying his life Jewishly only through the impersonal method of *cheshbon*, not through the inner commitment of *re’iyah*. He somehow imagined that those who can afford to move to such pleasure spots, can afford to buy their religion! He probably conjectured that when you have reached a certain status you were exempt from the actual personal practice of Torah and Mitzvot. He thought that sympathy and support are sufficient substitutes for actual practice and participation, that good *cheshbon* for charity deductions can take the place of *re’iyah*-reality. And so this great teacher – the one who outweighed all the other students of R. Yochanan b. Zakkai, the one who responded to his rabbi’s request for the major element of a good life by proclaiming the paramount importance of “the good heart” now could no longer read the words *ha-chodesh ha-zeh lakhem*, which represent the Torah’s injunction to live life wholly and personally, and instead read: *ha-cheresh hayah libam*, the heart is muted, the spirit is dumb, the soul is silenced and insensitive. The man who believed in the good heart – his very heart was now stricken dumb.

And so he learned that it is not enough to have external gestures, you need internal involvements. Religion, Torah, Judaism are either truly personal, or ultimately meaningless. Organizational work is blessed – provided it accompanies a profound personal commitment. Otherwise, the “Organization Man” in Jewish life cannot survive to the next generation. Only those whose communal work is based upon personal participation in the cause which they espouse, only those who have subjective commitment, and are not mere absentee landlords, can expect that their work and its value be abiding.

How can we, in our lives, assure that we will have *kiddush al yedei re’iyah* rather than *kiddush al yedei cheshbon*? How can we implement *ha-chodesh ha-zeh*

lakhem so as to avoid *ha-cheresh hayah libam*?

We can make sure that our children will participate in the preparation of Passover, in the burning of the Chametz, in the cleaning of the home, and the preparing of the Seder plates.

When it comes to charity, we must live not only through the *cheshbon* of the checkbook and its impersonality, but the *re'iyah* of involvement in groups dedicated to personal assistance to those less fortunate, and to direct contact with the beneficiaries of our generosity.

Torah education must mean for us not only the support of other scholars, as great and important as that is, but also the advancement of our own Jewish learning, at whatever level we are, by participation in classes and lectures of all kinds.

With regard to the State of Israel it means that in addition to our own financial assistance, we must visit the land, we must see to it that our children spend at least a

year there and study, if they will not settle there.

No wonder that we welcome the month of Nisan, the month of liberation, with the admonition *ha-chodesh ha-zeh lakhem*. The Jewish emphasis on personality, its abhorrence of the mechanical and the dehumanized, is decisive in the preparation for the celebration of freedom. For man is free only when he can be himself, only when man can reach into the deepest recesses of his own uniqueness, his own selfhood, and thus establish permanent bonds with other free beings created in the image of G-d. For there is no alternative to this save that of the petrified spirit, the silenced self, the insensate soul: *ha-cheresh hayah libam*.

This month - as every month - the Torah challenges us: this month is unto you. This is your month. Make it your own by opening your eyes and sanctifying nature; by opening your heart - sanctifying life itself.

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Work and Rest

Dr. Erica Brown

It seems like everyone today is talking and writing about work: the great resignation, the evolution of office life and the culture of remote meetings. The empty building is the new symbol of American jobs. We're unsure how to get people back into offices or how to retool work life to accommodate the flexibility that has become a right rather than a privilege. The title of Sarah Jaffe's recent book *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone* says it all. Jaffe argues that we have overly romanticized our work lives and created all kinds of unrealistic emotional expectations of what it should be: "We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love."

Organizational leaders often exploit this need by promoting false images of the fun, mission, or sense of familial belonging attached to work, especially to those with little control of their work day: "The compulsion to be happy at work, in other words, is always a demand for emotional work from the worker." Jaffe warns her readers that this premise is mistaken: "Work, after all, has no feelings. Capitalism cannot love." Families, for example, do not fire people. When families relocate, they take you with them.

Jaffe asks that we rethink why we began working in the

first place: to pay the bills. Now the dignity of affording one's life has been eclipsed by a notion of work that is an all-consuming identity. The humble brag about overwork has become a cliché: "The ownership class these days does tend to work, and indeed, to make a fetish of its long hours." The tensions she points out are greater with creative work, which is "based in a different kind of self-sacrifice and voluntary commitment that is expected, on some level, to love you back." This, too, is untrue. "Yet work never, ever loves you back."

This week's double Torah reading Vayakhel/Pekudei has a lot to say about work and about when to stop work: "Moses then convoked the whole Israelite community and said to them: "These are the things that God has commanded you to do: On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of complete rest, holy to God..." (Ex. 35:1-2). If we closed our eyes, we might be in the early chapters of Genesis, not the closing chapters of Exodus. Our sedra opens by mimicking the language of creation about the purposefulness of work and the necessity of rest. We were to build the Mishkan for six days and rest on the seventh.

What God declared when the world was created reflected the same pattern in building the portable

sanctuary to honor him.

The classic commentators make the connection between Shabbat and the Mishkan explicit. Rashi on 35:1, for example, cites the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, that God instructed Moses about the Sabbath before discussing the building procedures as if to say no matter how extraordinary the work, we must prioritize the sanctity of the Sabbath. One might easily assume that erecting a sacred space to honor God would trump Sabbath observance. The temptation to keep going – to place one more board, to smelt one more fixture, or to embroider one more stitch – would have been overwhelming. Nahmanides highlights the expression “these are the things which the Eternal has commanded” as a reference not only to the building’s structures but also to the holy vessels made to service God within its portable walls. Busy yourself as artists for six days, but even this special work must come to an end.

The message could not be clearer. The end of all creation is not building but resting.

The pinnacle of creation can only be achieved by the cessation of creation. It is ironically the Sabbath, the “cathedral in time,” as Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel called it, that is the acme of the process. “To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks,” reminds Rabbi Heschel. “The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern.”

Vayakhel makes the case that for the ancient Israelites to achieve true piety as a community, they needed to combine holy space with holy time. That is why in the midst of all of the Mishkan’s instructions, God assures Moses of our spiritual priorities. This break in the work also flattened whatever artisanal hierarchies existed in the Mishkan’s

The Equalizer

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z”l

In parshas Vayakheil, Moshe gathers the people together in order to command them to make their contributions to the mishkan and to construct it, under the oversight of Betzalel, whom he appoints for this task.

construction. Everyone had a distinct role in the building project. Some had tasks demanding a high level of skill and expertise that made their work seem superior. But when everyone stops working to observe the Shabbat, the community sheds itself of titles and talents. Work creates status. Rest is status-free. I’m always moved by the view from the pew: people with impressive business cards sit beside those too young to work, those who are retired, or those who have simple jobs. It does not matter. In this space, we are all spiritual citizens in the eyes of God, judged not by our place in society but by our goodness and piety. There must be somewhere in the world where the first question someone asks you is not what you do but who you are.

“Our Shabbat is a religious institution,” writes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in *A Letter in the Scroll*. Shabbat is “a memorial to creation, the day on which God Himself rested. But it is also and essentially a political institution. Shabbat is the greatest tutorial in liberty ever devised ... One day in seven, Jews create a Messianic society... It is the day on which all hierarchies, all relationships of power are suspended.”

Shabbat suspends hierarchy and produces the necessary restoration to keep the holiest of building projects going. Rest is not a weakness. It is our greatest strength. Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, who used to coach Olympic athletes and then began working with corporate leaders, share that one of the most important lessons they learned from extraordinary athletes is the way they build recovery into their routines. In their book, *The Power of Full Engagement*, they write, “We live in a world that celebrates work and activity, ignores renewal and recovery, and fails to recognize that both are necessary for sustained high performance.”

As a leader, how do you build rest and recovery into your routine to maintain high performance? How can you integrate more of Shabbat’s gifts into your life?

Before issuing his directives concerning the mishkan, however, Moshe again commands them to observe the Shabbos. The rabbis derive, from this juxtaposition, besides the principle already derived from an earlier, similar

juxtaposition, that the construction of the mishkan does not override the prohibition of doing labor on Shabbos, the further principle that the thirty-nine types of labor that are prohibited on Shabbos are the same thirty-nine types of labor that were done in the construction of the mishkan. Why were these principles of Shabbos mentioned here, when Moshe was about to call for contributions to the mishkan, appoint Betzalel over its construction, and command him to proceed with the construction ?

The key to answering this question lies in the opening word of the parsha, *'Vayakehil'*, which means 'and he gathered.' Rav Ya'akov ben Rabbeinu Asher, in his commentary *Ba'al HaTurim*, comments that Shabbos is mentioned in the context of this word to teach us that Jews should gather on Shabbos to learn Torah as taught by their leaders. There is, of course, a purely functional reason for Shabbos serving as day when people gather to hear Torah lessons, since they are free from their usual weekday duties, and have the time needed to attend such lectures. However, there is, I believe, a wider function in these gatherings, which is to unite the people around the study of Torah. While, during the week, each person pursues his own activities, each one with varying degrees of success and consequent station in life, on Shabbos, everyone gathers as equals to study Torah together. These kinds of gatherings may also underscore the notion, as explained by Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik based on some passages in the Talmud (see *Niddah* 30b and *Sanhedrin* 7a) that every Jew has a unique part of Torah to reveal, and our understanding of Torah can only be complete when we recognize this factor, and enable each Jew to teach us his portion of Torah.

The need for the kind of unity brought out in the word *'Vayakheil'* was especially important in the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf. Ramban writes that there was a need to bring the people together, to reconcile them, because they had split into various factions at the time of the sin. This comment has special significance in view of the Ramban's approach to the mishkan, which he sees as an extension of the experience of God's divine presence at Mt. Sinai. The rabbis tell us that the people were unified when they received the Torah, and, in fact, this unity was a precondition for receiving it. As Rabbi Gedaliyohu Schorr explains in his *Ohr Gedaliyohu*, this is because, as we have mentioned, each person in the nation contributes to our understanding of the Torah. Since the mishkan is

an extension of the experience at Mt. Sinai, then, there was a need to reconcile the people with each other and unify them in order for the mishkan to serve its purpose. We may add that the contributions for the construction of the mishkan, which included a half-shekel, no more and no less, required of each person from age twenty, added to this sense of unity that needed to be generated at this time, and that is why the contributions are again mentioned here by Moshe.

Rabbi Schorr also mentions that the mishkan, on a wider scale, represented the entire universe, as created by God. This is why the midrash tells us that Betzalel knew how to combine the letters through which God created the universe. The mishkan was, in miniature, a representative of the universe as a whole, which God created through ten *'ma'amoros'*, or utterances, and just as the world, as created by God, is a reflection of His unity, so, too, the mishkan, which is a miniature representation of the world, must also reflect that unity. Betzalel, the grand architect of the mishkan, knew how to combine the letters of the *aleph-beis* in a way that brought out this unity. Rav Shlomo Goren, in his book *Toras HaShabbos VechaMoed*, advances the theory that God actually used thirty-eight of the thirty-nine labors later used in the construction of the mishkan in creating the universe. The one type of labor, or *melacha*, that God did not use in the creation was that of carrying from one domain to the other. Since God is referred to as *'Makom'*, or the location of the world, we cannot speak of Him as 'carrying' when He created the universe. This factor, according to Rabbi Goren, is reflected in the fact that 'carrying' is considered, by a number of medieval Talmudic commentators, as a *'melacha gerua'*, or an 'inferior' type of labor, and this distinction generates, according to them, several halachic consequences. Resting, on Shabbos, from the types of labor that God used in creating the universe, and which were later used in building the mishkan, serves as an acknowledgment that God created the world in six days and 'rested' on the seventh day.

The world, as created by God, was a reflection of His unity; and until the Jewish nation worshipped the golden calf, it reflected the divine unity, as well. By worshipping the eigel and declaring 'these are your gods, Israel,' they shattered that reflection of unity. Moshe's task, when he gathered the people together after pleading with God on their behalf, was to restore their lost unity. The mishkan, made through use of the thirty-nine categories of *melacha*,

reflected the unity inherent in the universe created by God, and its construction was therefore a means of restoring the unity that was lost at the incident of the eigel. Following our discussion regarding the unifying factor of Torah, we can add that the Torah actually served as the blueprint of the universe, as the Midrash Rabbah (Bereishis 1:2) tells us, and, therefore, the labors used in creating the

Extra, Extra!

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Feb 28, 2019)

This week's Parsha discusses the donations for building the Mishkan. At the end of the first half of this Parsha—the part about the donations, at the end of shlishi—the artisans inform Moshe that they have enough materials and *va-yitzav Moshe va-ya'aviru kol ba-machane leymor ish ve-isha al ya'asu od melacha li-trumat ha-kodesh, va-yikalei ha-am me-hovi*. Moshe sent an important message over the Public Address system in the machaneh telling the people that they have enough materials, and that no one should bring anymore for the Mishkan. And they all stopped. Why was this so important?

Rav Moshe Feinstein points out that it is always a mitzvah to donate to *bedek ha-bayis*, even when they don't need to build anything. So would it have been so terrible if people donated a little extra?

There are several suggestions given in the acharonim as to why it was important Moshe stopped the donations. Rav Menachem Ben Tzion Sacks, in his sefer *Menachem Tzion* explains that if they would have donated extra, they would have used it for *bedek ha-bayis*—this extra type of utensil, that extra decoration here, etc. And this would have added to the bulk and weight of the Mishkan. In the days of the Beis ha-Mikdash, whatever you donated stayed in one place—Mikdash is *kavua be-karka*. So that would have been fine. But in our case, the Leviim had to carry it all throughout their travels in the midbar. That's an exceptionally long trip. Granted, the required material for building the Mishkan was a mitzvah de-Orayta—and the Leviim had to carry it. But what if you donate extra? It's nice that you want to do more and donate to *bedek ha-bayis*, yet if you do, someone else would have to shlep it a thousand miles through the desert. Therefore, says Menachem Tzion, you should always do extra mitzvos and go *lifnim mi-shuras ha-din*. But that is only when you will

world, and its miniature representative, the mishkan, are reflections of the Torah itself. By gathering on Shabbos to learn Torah, we are able to realize the kind of national reconciliation that is necessary in order to bring down the divine presence among us, through the vehicle of the mishkan, which, as the Ramban says, perpetuated the experience the nation had at Mt. Sinai.

not burden someone else. If it will be a *tircha* on someone else, you should do only what you need to do. Don't be machmir at other person's expense.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his *Sefer Darash Moshe*, suggests a different interpretation. Moshe told people: You have a lot of things, materials, and resources in your life. I asked you to donate to the Mishkan—that's super-duper important. It's *devarim ha-omdim be-rumo shel olam*—to build a Mishkan. What might have Jews have thought? If you want to be oved Hashem with your resources, bring them to the Mishkan. Bring everything to the Mishkan. But what did Moshe tell them? Don't bring extra. I don't want anyone to make the mistake of thinking that to be oved Hashem you have to bring things out of your life to someplace else, to the Mishkan. Just like you were oved Hashem when you donated the necessities of the Mishkan, you can use the extra resources to be oved Hashem at home. Avodas Hashem is not only in the Mishkan. And while a certain amount is necessary for the Mishkan, the rest doesn't need to be used specifically there. Anything you do could be Avodas Hashem. Rav Moshe goes as far as to say: even your physical needs, such as satisfying food and respectable clothing, can also be Avodas Hashem. They give you self-respect, and allow you to function well in life and be *Mekadesh Shem Shomayim* by looking proper. All of this is included in Avodas Hashem. Instead of outsourcing and donating all his money to somewhere else, a real oved Hashem will use his resources to serve Hashem in his own home and personal life, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And that's why Moshe was so insistent that they do not bring everything they could to the Mishkan. He wanted them to know that although the Mishkan is glorious and sublime, it is not the only way to be oved Hashem - one can use all his resources to do mitzvos and make his entire life into avodas Hashem.

Shabbos, the Unifying Prelude to the Mishkan

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Moshe gathered the congregation of Bnei Yisrael and told them, “These are the words that God commands you: For six days you should work, and you should rest on the seventh day. Anyone who works on the seventh day is guilty of a capital offense. You should not make any fires on the seventh day.” (Shemos 35:1-3) Why in this particular rendition of Shabbos does the Torah mention that Moshe gathered the people? Moreover, why in this particular parsha of Shabbos does the Torah single out the prohibition against lighting fires? Shabbos has already appeared several times in the Torah, and never until now was the prohibition against making fires mentioned. A third question: Vayakhel-Pekudei is a long review of the construction of the Mishkan. We know there is a connection between the Mishkan and Shabbos—halacha states that even though the construction of the Mishkan is a wonderful and important mitzva, it was not done on Shabbos. The mitzva of keeping Shabbos overrides the mitzva of building the Mishkan.

Why is this so?

The Connection Between Mishkan and Shabbos

Earlier, the Torah describes in great detail the mitzva to build the Mishkan. Following this comes Parshas Ki Sisa, in which the Torah reminds us to keep Shabbos even during the construction of the Mishkan. In Parshas Vayakhel, the mitzva of Shabbos precedes the directive to build the Mishkan. Why in the original commandment in Ki Sisa does Shabbos come after the Mishkan commandment, while in Vayakhel, which describes the actual construction of the Mishkan, Shabbos precedes the construction?

The Shem Mishmuel presents an interesting thesis. Between the first commandment to build the Mishkan and this one in Vayakhel, an unexpected event happened, which changed the nature of the Mishkan, even if it externally appeared to be exactly the same. There is a Mishkan directive at Har Sinai in Ki Sisa before the golden calf, and there is another one in Vayakhel after the golden calf. After the eigel, everything changed. The keilim and measurements are identical, but the nature of each Mishkan is surprisingly different.

This is the key to answering our questions. Based on the Zohar, the Avnei Neizer says that Shabbos is “the secret of

one,” the day when everything is one with God. Shabbos is the day when this peace and unity are manifest. During the six days of the week, there is a barrier that distorts this unity. The laws of nature and the automatic functioning of the world create a veil through which it is hard to perceive God in the world. On Shabbos, though, the world and God unite, as do Israel and God. On that day, we feel God’s presence in whatever we do. When the mitzva of Mishkan was given, Hashem told Moshe that “*Kol ish asher yid’venu libo yikchu es terumasi*. Every man whose heart motivates him to donate should donate” (Shemos 25:2). The Midrash (Shemos 33) says this means that each person had enough holiness to warrant his own Mishkan. The phrase “*kol ish*” is missing from Parshas Vayakhel.

In this parsha, the Torah uses the phrase “*nediv lev*” (35:22), calling on people of generous heart to donate, but does not use the more universal expression of “*kol ish*.”

Before the eigel, when the Jewish People were pure and unsullied by sin, every Jew was on such a high spiritual level that he alone warranted the construction of God’s dwelling in the world. However, the sin of the eigel effected a spiritual catastrophe. It destroyed the individual level of the Jew. Now, only the nation of Israel as a collective entity could build a house for Hashem’s presence in the world. There was a shift from the individual to the community.

This is why we need Shabbos. Shabbos creates unity between people, the world, and Hashem. Only the lesson of Shabbos gives us the power of connection and unity so that we can merit the connection to God’s presence in the Mishkan.

Aharon’s Plan for the Eigel

The Shem Mishmuel discusses what happened at the sin of the golden calf and, in particular, the role of Aharon. Aharon gathered the gold, threw it into the fire, and fashioned the calf. He was a great tzaddik. How could he do this? How could he make an idol?

The second of the Ten Commandments forbids the fashioning of an idol. Of course, he was under tremendous pressure, but even so, how could he do such an aveira? According to the Midrash (see Rashi Shemos 32:5), Aharon saw that they had killed Chur, and he didn’t want the people to be responsible for his murder as well. But still, how could he be pressured to make an idol?

The eigel was a regression back to the ways of Egypt. But Aharon, as a spiritual doctor, wanted to treat the cause of the illness, not just the symptoms. Moshe had disappeared and the people felt frantic. But Aharon looked for the real cause. He saw that the people had lost their sense of unity. As long as Moshe was with them, they were united. Since Bnei Yisrael had accepted Moshe as their leader, they stood united around him and loyal to him. They believed that every word he spoke was from God.

This created a unity among Bnei Yisrael. Before matan Torah, the Torah says, “*Vayichan sham Yisrael neged hahar*” (Shemos 19:2). *Vayichan* is in the singular form. The nation, says Rashi, camped as one. They were unified around Moshe’s leadership. But after the Ten Commandments were given, Moshe went up to the mountain to learn Torah for forty days and to receive the luchos. Chazal say that Hashem held one side of the luchos and Moshe held onto the other side with his two hands. They were partners in the Torah. Moshe had detached from physicality. He became a human being who was angelic, beyond the limitations of physicality. He didn’t eat or drink. His soul had in a way departed from his body to go to heaven to receive the Torah. This was an extremely high level. Moshe received the whole Torah, including the mitzvos and their explanations and the spiritual insights and lessons of the Torah. But this period became disastrous for the Jewish People, who were left alone without a leader. Moshe had left this world and entered the world of angels to be alone with Hashem in a higher world. Even his spirituality left Bnei Yisrael.

The Jewish People felt lost. They did not feel bound together with a single goal of serving Hashem. They had lost their model and teacher of this goal. The loss of Moshe was more than physical—it was a loss of identity for the people.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Moshe’s role among the people can be compared to the role of the neshama in the body. The living soul unites the body. When a person dies and the living soul leaves, the body decays and literally falls apart. What unites the body during life into a single entity? Its life force, the neshama.

Similarly, God created the world and its many components in six days. Then, on the seventh day, He made Shabbos. What was the purpose of the Shabbos? It was to unite the world.

The pasuk (Shemos 31:17) says Hashem rested on the

seventh day (*shavas*) and took a deep breath (*vayinafash*). According to Chassidus, *vayinafash* means that God breathed life into the world. In six days, Hashem created many things, but the world was not united. On Shabbos, he blew His life force into the world, thereby uniting it. On Shabbos, God finished the world. Similarly, the first time the Torah mentions Shabbos, it starts with the word *vayechulu* (Bereishis 2:1), which the Shem Mishmuel explains to mean that Hashem made a *klal*, He united all of His creations. There is an aphorism that if a butterfly flaps its wings in Japan, a tornado may sometime later rip across South Dakota. Everything in the world is connected. The food chain is a great example of this. The universe must have a life force that connects everything so it doesn’t all fall apart. Shabbos is the *klal*, the *nefesh*, the living soul of creation that holds it all together.

Just like Shabbos is the living soul of creation, Moshe was the soul of the Jewish People. The Shem Mishmuel cites a pasuk: “*Sheish mei’os elefragli ha’am asher anochi b’kirbo*. [There are] six hundred thousand people in this nation in whose midst I am” (Bamidbar 11:21). On a Chassidic/Kabbalistic level, *asher anochi b’kirbo* takes on a surprising meaning. Moshe said, “I am the life force of this people”; because of me they are one. The Ten Commandments are written in the singular form. *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, I am Hashem, your God. Hashem addresses the Jewish People as if they are one person, because the Jewish People is one. Moshe’s neshama and being gave them their focus and identity.

Moshe inspired a wonderful unity among the people, but it had a corresponding danger. If Moshe were to disappear, they could lose their unity.

Moshe’s Argument with Hashem

The Midrash says that when Hashem was about to punish the Jews for the golden calf, Moshe objected, “But you commanded only me, not them. After all, Anochi Hashem Elokecha was commanded in singular” (see Rashi Shemos 20:2). How could Moshe make such a claim? Clearly, Hashem gave the Ten Commandments to the Jewish People as a whole!

The answer is that even though Hashem was talking to all of Israel, Moshe was the soul who received that command. “If anyone is responsible for the golden calf,” Moshe said, “It is me.” When the soul of Israel flew out of its body to go to the mountain to learn Torah in Heaven, it created a disconnect with the people below. The people

felt they had lost their identity and unity. They splintered into many different factions. Some said, “Let’s stay loyal to Aharon and Chur.” Others said, “Let’s go back to Egypt,” and still others said, “Let’s make an idol.”

According to the Torah, when a person dies and the soul goes to heaven, the body becomes full of tuma. Evil energies enter the body to replace the holy soul. According to Chassidus, this is a fundamental phenomenon. When holiness leaves a place, the space is filled by tuma. The dead body of a Jew becomes defiled because it has lost the holiness of a Jewish soul. When Moshe’s soul left the Jewish People, the people lost their collective holy soul. It was then replaced by evil energies that wreaked havoc among the nation.

Aharon understood this better than anyone else. From day one, Aharon had partnered with Moshe Rabbeinu. He knew how much his presence meant to the people. And he knew how much damage was being caused by his absence. Aharon realized that the problem was that the people had lost their unity. He said, “We need to reunite. If we could only reestablish our unity and collective direction, we could get back on track.”

As Jews, if we think about our current situation in the world, we must realize how our disunity is wreaking havoc. We can’t agree on fundamental things. Our people does not agree about the Land of Israel and the Jewish role there, about Judaism and democracy in Israel and America, or how to raise Jewish children. What should our attitudes be towards deviant behavior? There are major debates on the issues of marriage and divorce. There are many issues that drive us apart, and the resulting disunity causes us so much trouble.

Aharon was in the middle of this maelstrom. The people were splintering into factions, and Aharon wanted to reunite them. He fashioned the golden calf with this goal. He thought it would unify Bnei Yisrael in a good way.

The Shem Mishmuel refers to a letter written by Rav Aharon Chernobyl, one of the great Chassidic leaders. He wanted everyone in his community to contribute towards a certain cause. He wrote, “Don’t think that I need the money. I have enough money to sponsor this cause on my own. But I want you all to be united. In supporting this cause, you will be united. I will need to pray for you, and when you are all united in this way, I will be able to effectively pray for you and bring your prayers together to heaven.”

Money and Dreams

People want money; they dream and fantasize about what they would do with more of it. It represents people’s wishes. Usually, people wish for good things. They say, “If only I would win the lottery with a 225-million-dollar jackpot—look at the great things I could do. I would take care of my wife and children. I would build hospitals for the sick. I would open centers for the poor and homeless to live in. All my great dreams would materialize if I only won the 225-million-dollar jackpot.” Chassidus teaches that money is not evil—it just depends on what you want to do with that money. If you have the right ideas, money is great.

Rav Aharon Chernobyler said, “All you people are asking me to pray for you. You, my follower, want a child; you, my follower, want health; you want to find a shidduch. Each person has so many different needs. The money we have represents those wishes and those needs. Let’s bring all our different desires and needs together. Let’s get involved in a unifying project, and then I will be able to unify your prayers.”

Aharon said everyone should give some gold towards what would become the eigel. As the most precious metal, gold contains people’s highest aspirations. By donating gold to a common cause, people give up their personal desires and merge them together with other people’s personal desires. Aharon received the gold from them and threw it into the fire.

The Shem Mishmuel cites an idea from the *Ya’aros Devash* of Rav Yonasan Eibshitz. Why is so much of our food cooked? We have to heat it up first before we can eat it. Why did Hashem make it this way? Rav Eibshitz explained that when Adam and Chava ate from the Eitz Hada’as, the snake—which had convinced them to eat—was able to poison the food with evil. Evil became part of the food that people eat. In the process of cooking, the heat of the fire purges the poison of the snake. Cooking doesn’t just prepare the food chemically and physically; it prepares it spiritually. Fire drives away the spiritual poison that has been there since the sin of Adam and Chava.

Fire has the power to purge evil and to purify. When people dig up gold and other precious metals from the ground, they use fire to clean out the dross. Fire can cause a painful purification, but it purifies nonetheless.

Aharon thought that when they put all their gold into the fire, they would understand that all their foolish wishes were being given away to the fire. The fire would purify

their frantic wishes now that Moshe was gone, and they would let Aharon help them get back to pure gold, to reestablish their Jewish unity.

If the people would have listened to him, he would have been successful. He would have formed the gold into a harmless golden thing that may even have inspired the people to return to God. But the Jewish People were not ready for that fire to remove the impurities. They were not ready to attain this single-minded dedication. They couldn't overcome the impure forces that filled the void Moshe had left behind. They identified the calf that emerged as an idol, and it became the catastrophic distortion of Judaism. Moshe came down from the mountain with the power to reignite the Jewish People with his presence. He threw the calf into the fire, burned it, and purified the people with its ashes. After the calf episode, Moshe moved on to the mitzva of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan in the Aftermath of the Eigel

At this stage, the Mishkan needed a new context. Shabbos, the day of unity, provided that new context. Shabbos for the post-eigel Mishkan was not an afterthought. It was the necessary prelude to the Mishkan. Shabbos is the day when man and God are united in the "secret of one." When the people were united through Shabbos, they could stay together and build a Mishkan. At this point, if the Jews would fall into individuality, they would not be able to build a Mishkan. Accordingly, Shabbos here is mentioned before the Mishkan.

Moshe thus started by gathering the Jews together as a community. Shabbos is the key to the Jewish People's unity. It is the foundation for their ability to build a Mishkan, a holy place for Hashem in this world.

Moshe—Leader of a United People

In the end of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu died just like other people. His main efforts were to preserve Hashem's teaching for future generations. In many ways, we keep the memory of Moshe Rabbeinu alive. We read the Torah. Many psukim read, "*Vayedabeir Hashem el Moshe leimor.*"

Stones of Remembrance

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's double parshios, Vaykhel-Pekudei, the Mishkan is built under the direction of the master craftsmen, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur from the tribe

of Yehuda, and Ohaliav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.

Hashem spoke to Moshe to say." In this way, as we learn Torah today, Moshe Rabbeinu is still alive. Shabbos is a time of unity just as the Mishkan is a place of unity. Even though the Beis Hamikdash has been destroyed, *Shechina eina beteila*, Hashem is still with us. Through the power of the Torah of Moshe, through the study and teaching of Torah, we have a sense that Moshe is still leading us. We have a sense of unity among the Jewish People.

Our prayer is that this united feeling of *ish echad b'lev echad*, of being a single identity of Am Yisrael through Shabbos, Torah, and the Beis Hamikdash and Yerushalayim, will spread to every Jew in the world. Moshe gathered us together with Vayakhel. He didn't want us to be divided into small factions. When we are united, we have the holiness of the Torah. The unity of Am Yisrael has to be related to Torah and mitzvos and especially to Shabbos.

We now can answer our other questions. The power of Shabbos to create unity among our people and with Hashem is greater than the power of the Mishkan, demonstrated by the fact that Shabbos is permanent whereas the Mishkan was destroyed. Thus, on Shabbos, we don't build the Mishkan.

Furthermore, the sweetness and holiness of Shabbos is more powerful than fire when it comes to purging evil and producing unity. It can succeed where fire failed. Therefore, the Torah here states the prohibition not to start fires on Shabbos, because Shabbos is the greatest of all spiritual fires.

Let us take inspiration from the unifying Mishkan. Our Shabbos can be the unifying factor among all of us. Let us keep Shabbos and invite fellow Jews to our Shabbos table. Let us pray, sing, dance, and enjoy Shabbos together. Through the power of Shabbos, the Jewish People can become united again as one person with one heart, with the soul and teachings of Moshe Rabbeinu energizing and uniting us.

of Yehuda, and Ohaliav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.

After all the plans, instructions and blueprints have been

laid out in Terumah, Tetzaveh and Ki Sisa, the building of the Mishkan now takes place.

In the courtyard of the Mishkan stood the Copper Altar for animal sacrifices, and the Kiyor (Laver), from where the kohanim washed their hands and feet before performing the service in the Mishkan. Inside the Kodesh itself, stood three golden keilim: the Golden Altar for the daily incense offerings, the Menorah, and the Golden Table which housed the twelve loaves of the lechem ha'panim (bread of surfaces). Separating the Kodesh from the Kodesh Kodashim (the Holy of Holies) was the woven paroches, partition. Inside the Holy of Holies stood the Aaron Kodesh (the Holy Ark), which housed the Luchos (Stone Tablets of Testimony) in its interior. Atop the Ark were two Keruvim (golden cherubs), with faces of children, whose wings were spread upward and faces one to another. It was between these two keruvim that the Shechinah rested, keviyachol, and from here the voice of G-d emanated outward to speak to Moshe.

Atop the Mishkan were three coverings: the Mishkan covering (which was the lowest covering), the Ohel covering (the middle covering), and the Mich'seh covering (the uppermost covering made of ram skins dyed red and techashim skins). Surrounding the Mishkan space were wooden beams, covered in gold, which stood in silver sockets.

It was in this holy "sanctuary in space" (cf. Rav Soloveitchik zt'l) that the Kohanim would perform their daily avodah. They washed their hands and feet, they brought many animal sacrifices, they offered the incense twice daily, and they prepared, cleaned and lit the menorah.

The kohanim officiated in special priestly vestments, the bigdei kehunah. The Kohen Gadol (K"G) wore eight special garments and the Kohen Hedyot wore four.

One of the garments worn by the K"G was the Choshen, the Breastplate, which had upon it, set in golden settings, twelve stones - each one corresponding to a different shevet (tribe), engraved with the name of that tribe. It was attached to the shoulder straps of the K"G from above and to the apron (eiphod) of the K"G from below. In regard to the breastplate, the pasukim tell us: "And they prepared the shoham stones, enclosed in gold settings, engraved like the engraving of a seal, with the names of the tribes of Israel; וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָם, עַל כְּתֹפֶת הָאֶפֶד--אֲבִי זְכָרוֹן, לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָם עַל כְּתֹפֶת הָאֶפֶד - *and he put them upon the shoulder straps of the*

eiphod as stones of remembrance for the children of Israel, as Hashem had commanded Moshe (Shemos 39:6-7).

The Torah identifies these beautiful stones as: אֲבִי זְכָרוֹן, *stones of remembrance*. Who is supposed to remember and what are we supposed to remember from these stones?

Rabbi Shalom Rosner teaches that one can infer that Hashem remembers Am Yisrael and that the K"G, who is representative of the Jewish people and performing the service in the Temple on their behalf, is acting so Hashem can remember them favorably.

The Meshech Chochmah, however, offers an alternative suggestion, which suggests that the stones of remembrance are for the Bnei Yisrael themselves to remember! Bnei Yisrael should be reminded of having the name of their tribe engraved on the K"G's choshen as he performs his daily service, and this remembrance should serve as a means of deterring them from engaging in any form of sin (Shalom Rav, v.I, p.485-486).

Rabbi Rosner quotes a famous teaching of Chazal. The Sages teach that when Yosef ha'Tzaddik was very close to sinning with Eishes Potiphar (Bereishis Ch.39): בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה בְּאֵתָהּ דְּיוֹקְנֵי שָׁל אָבִיו וְנִרְאָתָהּ לוֹ בַּחֲלוֹן אָמַר לוֹ יוֹסֵף עֲתִידִין אַחֲרָיָה שְׂיִכְתְּבוּ עַל אֲבִי אֶפֶד וְאֵתָהּ בְּיַמֵּיהֶם רְצוּנָה שְׂיִמְחָה שְׂמֵךְ מִבְּיַמֵּיהֶם וְנִתְקַרָּא רוּעָה זֹנוֹת - *at that moment, the image of his father came and appeared to him in the window, and (his father) said to him: Yosef! In the future, your brothers will have their names engraved on the stones of the breastplate of the K"G, and your name will be amongst them. Do you want your name to be erased and (instead you will be) called companion of harlots? (Sotah 36b).* Upon hearing this, immediately, the Gemara teaches, he was able to withstand her temptation and seduction, and he fled outside.

R' Rosner continues and notes that it is interesting that Yaakov, who could have said so many things to encourage Yosef to refrain from sinning, refers to the fact that his name would be engraved on the breastplate of the K"G, and it is this engraving that should give Yosef the courage to make the right choice, to overcome his urges and protect his reputation. In this way, he would be worthy of having his name remain engraved alongside those of his brothers, on the stones of the Breastplate.

These stones, upon which the names of the shevatim were engraved, are there to serve as a reminder for all of us to conduct our lives in a moral and ethical manner, in accordance with halacha, so that we merit to be listed adjacent to our brethren. Yosef was saved because he

foresaw what his destiny would be: that his name would be on the holy stones of the bigdei kehunah. We must always remember - זָכְרוּנוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ וְקָרוֹנוּ, *stones of remembrance* - our past, and the generations who came before us, and look ahead to the future: our potential, our children, and the destiny of our

Are We Too Close To Hashem?

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The greatest drama of human history was about to unfold. It had been 2500 years since Man's first disobedience and since humanity was expelled from Eden. During this dark period, Hashem's presence was obscured by a hostile world of violence and immorality. Finally, His chosen people were about to welcome Him back into the human realm.

Hashem had liberated us from Egyptian tyranny and had provided us safe and dry passage through a watery ocean bed. By worshipping a golden idol, we betrayed our loyalties and were very close to forfeiting our destiny. Responding to our furious prayers, Hashem relented and was now prepared to descend into our realm and lodge His presence in a human-crafted abode. Excitement and anticipation filled the barren desert dunes as history was about to change.

Suddenly, the unexpected occurred. Hashem's presence flooded the inner chamber of the Tabernacle, sealing it against human entry. The greatest religious project in history concluded with Moses, the greatest man to ever live, standing outdoors, unable to breach the house of Hashem. At the conclusion of this long-awaited reunion between Man and God, Man is left outside in the cold, distant from Hashem.

Two modes

Our relationship with Hashem is braced by two contrasting mentalities. Our souls reach out to the great beyond, searching for a connection with our Creator in heaven. We compile a multi-layered relationship with Hashem through various religious experiences: we study His word and exercise His commandments. In moments of weakness, we petition Him in prayer, and in moments of triumph we express our gratitude. We partner with Him in relandscaping a fallen world into a better place. We carve our own moral personalities based upon His example. There are many avenues through which we seek a relationship with Hashem.

nation (Shalom Rav, v.I, p.486).

In this way the stones will truly serve as a remembrance for all of us: to remember the past, stay focused on our mission in the present, and continue with dignity, courage, fortitude and grace, to build Am Yisrael for the future.

Though Hashem isn't human we overlay human relationships onto our relationship with Him, lending it greater passion. For example, we view Him as our Father or, sometimes, as our Husband, even though He is

neither. By simulating human interactions with Hashem, we craft an emotional relationship with Him.

Beyond

Despite our best efforts at building that relationship, Hashem lies beyond human comprehension. As no word found in the human vocabulary aptly describes Him, He remains indecipherable. To paraphrase Isaiah 55 "His thoughts are unlike our thoughts and His ways are unlike our ways". Religion demands submission to an unknowable Being, forever unfathomable, and forever lying beyond the realm of human experience. As much as we try to know Him, we know that that we cannot fully know Him.

These two complementary modes to our relationship with Hashem form a powerful combination. We attempt to better understand Him, while realizing that we are chasing an elusive unknown. Religion may not always make sense, but we are, none the less, locked in a relationship with a Higher being whose logic defies human comprehension.

Despite our efforts to draw Him into our world and into our lives, we, like Moshe, stand outside, unable to penetrate the mystery. This duality lends Judaism its potency and its latency. Knowledge and mystery. Ration and trust. Visibility and fog. Entering and remaining outside. Close but distant. Ahava and yirah.

The Distance of Exile

The jagged revolutions of Jewish history toppled this delicate calibration between distance and nearness. As the Jewish exile prolonged, the Jewish world turned darker, and Hashem appeared ever more distant. The course of Jewish history baffled us, and ancient Biblical promises became obscured during excruciating periods of Jewish suffering. During the long exile Hashem's plan for His

people was veiled and His presence was hidden as hatred and discrimination devoured our people. During exile Jewish faith was built upon a platform of mystery and Hashem felt very distant.

Chassidus

In the 18th century a bold movement determined to bridge the ever-growing distance between Hashem and His people, stressing that we were forever bound to a God, though invisible, continued to drive our historical arch. Chassidus underscored the great love between Hashem and His people, a love which could outlast the dark tunnel of Jewish exile. Hashem still had a larger plan for Jewish history, but its trajectory wasn't always obvious. Chassidus rescued Jews from historical depression, restoring faith in a God who appeared distant, but was closer than anyone could imagine.

Turning the Tables of History

In the past century, history shifted, and with it, our relationship with Hashem was transformed. In 1948 the heavens parted, as our state and our sovereignty were restored, amidst great miracles. After thousands of years of radio silence Hashem was clearly speaking to us, and He felt closer than He had been in thousands of years.

Are we too close? Is there actually an issue of being too close to Hashem?

Knowing the Ways of Hashem

Elated with redemptive fervor, many religious Jews feel too close with Hashem and exude unrealistic and unhealthy confidence, claiming to “precisely” know Hashem’s will. As the tables of history have turned in our favor some religious Jews feel too confident in their relationship with Hashem. We know exactly what He wants, and we can adopt policies based upon that certain knowledge.

Seventeen years ago, Israel willfully disengaged from our Aza settlements attempting to advance greater peace. Unfortunately, hopes for peace were cruelly dashed and we

Maintaining Hope, Faith and Optimism

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Parshas Vayakhel tells of the skilled artisans – both men and women – who constructed the Mishkan and its various furnishings. The obvious question arises as to how these craftsmen developed such skills. When did they learn and train to be professional builders

were left with a terrorist state on our Western border.

In the leadup to this traumatic event some Rabonim in Israel assured us that this would not, and could not, happen. Hashem could not possibly allow His chosen people to be evicted from His chosen land. Several Rabbonim issued a well-known Hebrew guarantee of “haya lo tiyeh” assuring that this calamity would not happen. Hashem would not allow it. After all, in the modern state of Israel religious people know Hashem’s will.

I was surprised that such a brash guarantee was issued. Eighty years earlier, Hashem had allowed the holocaust and had allowed six million to be murdered. No human imagination can possibly understand that horror, yet Hashem allowed it to happen. If Hashem can allow a holocaust to occur, He can also allow a Jewish government to peacefully relocate 8000 Jews without loss of life. Sometimes Hashem takes actions which the human mind can’t comprehend. For centuries we lived with this awareness, and we accepted harsh fates, even when they confused us. Now that we have returned, we expect Hashem’s will to always align with human understanding. It doesn’t always happen, and we shouldn’t gamble upon divine will.

This episode wasn’t just troubling to me but was also troubling to many adolescent and young-adult Israelis still in the process of building their faith. They were assured that Hashem would not allow this disengagement, but they woke up one August morning to discover that it had, indeed occurred. Being assured of the divine will and discovering those assurances to be incorrect, can destabilize faith. Sadly, many lost their faith.

We are close and we are far. We understand Him and yet He remains a mystery. So it has been for thousands of years and so it will remain. This is what makes our religion so robust.

and artisans?

The Meshivas Nefesh (cited in Otzar Pela’os Ha’Torah) offers a remarkable explanation – stating that during the years of slavery in Egypt, there were those who anticipated the nation’s redemption, and began preparing for the

construction of the Mishkan already then. Even in the dark period of bondage, these individuals did not lose hope. They maintained their faith and optimism, and trusted that the redemption would arrive. So much so, that they actually began preparing to build the Mishkan by learning the skills needed for this project.

The Tur (O.C. 417) records the custom that women refrain from work each month on Rosh Chodesh. This quasi holiday, as Pirkei De'Rabbi Eliezer (45) teaches, was given to the women in reward for their refusal to participate in the sin of the golden calf. In contrast to their enthusiastic donation of jewelry for the construction of the Mishkan, they refused to give their jewelry for the golden calf. They were rewarded with a special holiday each month, on Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Chodesh is the time

when the moon is barely visible. But even then, when the moon can hardly be seen, we know with certainty that it will “recover” and grow large and shine brightly once again. Am Yisrael, like the moon, endures periods of darkness, when our “light” barely shines, but we maintain our hope that brighter days lay ahead. When Moshe Rabbeinu did not return from the mountaintop when the people expected, the men despaired, and resorted to the worship of a golden calf. The women, however, maintained their faith. They did not panic; they felt hopeful and optimistic that Moshe would yet return. This is why their reward was the holiday of Rosh Chodesh, the day which signifies our nation’s hope and optimism in the face of adversity, the confidence we have even in times of hardship that the light will soon shine brightly, and our redemption will unfold.

Celebrating the Month of Nissan

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This coming Shabbat, the final Shabbat of the Hebrew month of Adar, is also known as Shabbat Parashat HaChodesh. An additional Torah scroll is taken out on this Shabbat and Exodus 12:1-20 is read, announcing the arrival of the month of Nissan. Parashat HaChodesh is the last of four special Shabbatot that surround the festival of Purim. Shabbat Shekalim and Shabbat Zachor, precede Purim, and Shabbat Parah and Shabbat HaChodesh, follow Purim.

Our rabbis instituted that on the Shabbat immediately preceding the first of Nissan, or on Rosh Chodesh (the first day of the new month) itself, if it occurs on Shabbat, Parashat HaChodesh is to be read. The Torah in Exodus 12:2, declares: *הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֹדְשֵׁי, רֵאשִׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה, This month shall be for you the head of the months; it is the first for you of the months of the year.*

Even though the official Jewish New Year is celebrated on Rosh Hashanah, on the first of Tishrei, the Hebrew months themselves are numbered from Nissan, the month in which the Exodus took place. By numbering the months in this manner, all the other months recall the month of Nissan. Thus, Iyar and Sivan, respectively, are called the second and third months from Nissan, reminding us of the monumental, destiny-altering, experience of the exodus from Egypt.

Nissan, therefore, is the first, the “King” of all months. In fact, this concept is alluded to in the word from the

previously-cited biblical verse (Exodus 12:2), לָכֶם—*lah'chem*—to you, which contains the same letters as the Hebrew word מֶלֶךְ—*meh'lech*—king. As the “King” of all months, Nissan must be honored more than any other month, and therefore, as a token of respect, the new month of Nissan is announced publicly on Shabbat, and is made “unique” by chanting a special reading from the Torah and a special Haftarah from Ezekiel 45 and 46 is read.

Some of our later scholars point out a cogent distinction between the Jewish New Year that is celebrated on Rosh Hashana, and the new year that begins in Nissan. The Hebrew word for year, שָׁנָה—*shana*, is related to the word יָשָׁן—*Yashan*—old, and is also related to the word שָׁיְנָה—*shayna*—sleep. In effect, Rosh Hashanah itself emphasizes the old, set, and fixed, and conveys the idea that the laws of nature with which G-d ordained or created the world, are absolute and immutable. They are old. There is nothing new.

On the other hand, the Hebrew word for month, חֹדֶשׁ—*chodesh*, is related to the Hebrew word חָדַשׁ—*chadash*—new. Therefore, the month of Nissan underscores the miracles and wonders that are beyond the boundaries of nature. When G-d took the Jews out of Egypt in the month of Nissan, He suspended the laws of nature, and established a new path, and a new way of life that pertains to the Israelites alone. Those miracles remain with the Jewish people for all time.

It is in the month of Nissan that the children of Israel pray that the strength of their youth will be restored to them by both natural and supernatural means. It is in the month of Nissan that we expect the divine presence to be revealed. That is why the Torah declares, *הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם*, “*HaChodesh hazeh la’chem*” “this month is for you,” as if to say that something new should happen during this month—a new release, a new redemption.

Nissan is indeed a month “for you,” for us, and for the people of Israel. As the rabbis in the Talmud declare (Rosh Hashanah, 11a), Israel was redeemed in Nissan, and Nissan will be the month in which their future redemption will take place.

There is additional significance to be noted regarding the month of Nissan. In ancient times, each new month was declared to have commenced on the basis of the testimony of legally designated witnesses who had sighted

the new moon in the evening as it first appeared in the sky over Israel. On the other hand, the secular calendar, that is the solar calendar, is based on the sun. The nations of the world flourish during the time of light—when there is abundance and economic prosperity. The Jews, on the other hand, are able to prosper and survive even at night.

From whence do they draw the strength to endure despite the darkness? It is due to the fact that the Jewish people are compared to the moon itself—constantly renewing itself. The Jews are not intimidated by dark and bleak periods. In fact, it was during times of great adversity, the enslavement in Egypt, that the Jewish people were melded into a nation and gained the strength and fortitude to survive and prosper in the light that was to come.

May this coming new month of Nissan be a blessed month of renewal, and of inspiration, a month of joy and of peace, for Israel and for the entire world.

Moshe’s Concealed Entry to the Mishkan

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer

S efer Shemos concludes: “And he (Moshe) erected the *Chatzer* (Courtyard) around the Mishkan and the *Mizbeach* (Altar), and he installed the *Masach* (Screen) as the gate of the *Chatzer*; and Moshe completed the work. And the cloud covered the *Ohel Moed* (Tent of Meeting), and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan. And Moshe was unable to go into the Ohel Moed, for the cloud rested upon it and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan. And when the cloud arose from atop the Mishkan, B’nei Yisroel would travel in all their journeys. And if cloud did not arise, they would not travel until the day that it arose. For the cloud of Hashem was upon the Mishkan by day, and fire would be upon it by night, before the eyes of the entire *Beis Yisroel* (House of Israel) in all of their travels.” (40:33-38)

Rashi (on v. 35), invoking the Medrash, notes that the Torah would later appear to contradict the above passage that “Moshe was unable to go into the Ohel Moed”, as we read that Moshe indeed entered the Ohel Moed, where Hashem would speak with him. (V. Bamidbar 7:89.) The Medrash cited by Rashi explains that there is no contradiction, for the Torah in the above passage speaks of Moshe not being able to enter the Ohel Moed when “the cloud rested upon it” – implying that when the cloud was not present, Moshe would enter and Hashem would speak

with him there.

The question remains: Since Moshe was only restricted from entering the Ohel Moed when the cloud of Hashem was present, but he otherwise could enter for Divine communication, why does the Torah here basically omit this information? Would it not have been preferable and clearer for the Torah to record at this point that Moshe could enter the Ohel Moed and hear the voice of Hashem when the cloud arose therefrom? Why present this information here in an indirect rather than in a direct manner?

The bedrock concept of the Mishkan and of the Shechinah being manifest in our midst mandates total submission and awe. When Hashem’s Presence is revealed, we immediately yield to Hashem’s authority and mastery and we are struck by the penetrating and robust sensation of holiness that prevails. Only after submitting and yielding to Hashem’s authority and mastery, acutely cognizant of the environment of intense sanctity that predominates, may we be permitted to approach. Thus do we find with the account of the *S’neh*, the Burning Bush, where Moshe initially encountered Hashem’s Presence (Shemos 3:1-4:17), that Moshe was first instructed to maintain his distance and remove his shoes due to the sanctity of the site and the event. So too at Har Sinai, when the Shechinah

descended and B'nei Yisroel gathered for the *Aseres Ha-Dibros* (Ten Commandments), were the people repeatedly adjured in advance regarding personal conduct and the restriction of ascending the mount; only after these warnings and internalizing the extreme significance and awe engendered by this indescribably powerful occasion were our ancestors prepared to stand at Sinai and receive direct communication from Hashem.

Therefore, when describing the completion of the Mishkan by Moshe, does the Torah not immediately discuss his entry to the Ohel Moed. The message conveyed at this point is one of the overwhelming manifestation of the Shechinah, with an acute sense of sanctity and solemnity, that needs to be appreciated and internalized. Restriction, awe and submission to the Divine are the only concepts now. Entry into the locus of Hashra'as Ha-Shechinah (the immanent resting of Hashem's Presence in

our midst) is not to be focused upon at this juncture, for it would detract from the powerful sensation of daunting reverence and surrender to the exclusive omnipotence of Hashem that is engendered by His Presence. Discussion of Moshe's entry to the Ohel Moed could not occur until later. This is why the Torah here conceals Moshe's entry to the Ohel Moed.

So too is this the mandate for all generations when setting foot in mekomos kedoshim, holy spaces. When we enter, are we immediately comfortable and perhaps jovial, feeling as if we are in our living rooms, or are we struck by a sense of awe, reverence and submission?

Let us learn and embody the attitude and approach to *kedushah* (holiness) that lie in the deep recesses of the conclusion of Sefer Shemos and its sensational account of the Mishkan.