



Motivated Action • Parshat Vayakhel

Despite its heavily technical, famously repetitious, and externally focused descriptions, *Parshat Vayakhel* is deeply concerned with the inner dimensions of the human psyche. The verses are saturated with heart, as the word *lev* appears a dozen times. *Lev* connotes not just emotion, but indicates many psychological constructs such as thinking, memory, inclinations, desire, and motivation. In *Parshat Vayakhel* we encounter hearts that are lifted, generous, and wise.

Many commentators focus and elaborate on these internal descriptions, portraying the Israelites as virtuous volunteers who are inspired and committed to both donate generously and dedicate their time and energy to build the Tabernacle.

Some commentaries accentuate the importance of the inner world over the external manifestations. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski argues that God asked for donations solely so the giver can be uplifted and perfected. The entire goal was development of virtue. Likewise, according to Malbim, the essential aspect of the contributions wasn't the act of giving, but the passionate desire to donate, the generosity of spirit, and the accompanying character growth. In the language of 20th century *mussar* master Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, "the essence is the heart that accompanies the mitzvot." God wanted them to bring their hearts along with the gifts. This required the cultivation of proper thoughts, intentions, emotions, and motivations before contributing.

While inner motivations are no doubt important, focusing too much on intentions can backfire. Rashi, quoting a Midrash, critiques the princes for contributing last to the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:27). Even though they had noble objectives to provide whatever was needed after everyone else donated, their ultimate lack of expedient action was problematic.

Questioning the repetitiveness of *Parshat Vayakhel* when compared to the previous descriptions of the Tabernacle in *Parshat Terumah*, Rabbi Avraham Pam notes that the fundamental difference between the two is that in *Terumah* there is a command to make the Tabernacle ("ve'asita"), and *Vayakhel* describes the follow through ("ve'asu"). It was worth repeating the entire narrative just to emphasize that they executed the tasks.

Rabbi Aaron Levine, known as the Reisha Rav, also emphasizes the importance of quick commitment and performance of action. This is why, he contends, Moses appeals to the skilled laborers to "come and make," the emphasis on the exuberant commitment and expedient follow through (Ex. 35:10). These enterprising characteristics, writes Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, are key to both entrepreneurial and spiritual success. This was the trait of "everyone whose spirit was moved" to work on the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:21). Even though they had yet to learn the craft, they made a bold commitment to an important undertaking. Generating drive, taking initiative,

and implementing ambitious action can lead to exponential achievement.

Ideally, these two different emphases are ultimately complementary. Perfecting our internal thoughts, emotions, and motivations should

engender tangible constructive expressions.

Our goal is to produce sanctified actions that are infused with virtuous intentions, spiritual striving, and a burning desire to connect to the Divine.

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Character Challenge: Notice a need in the community and commit to action. Actively work on cultivating the proper spiritual intentions and plan for expeditious and successful follow through.

Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l: “Turning ideals into codes of action that shape habits of the heart is what Judaism and leadership are about. Never lose the inspiration of the Prophets, but never lose, either, the routines that turn ideals into acts and dreams into achieved reality” (“Sprints and Marathons,” *Covenant & Conversation*)