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Judaism and Jewishness: They Are Inseparable

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered March 9, 1956)

The deleterious and disintegrating effect that modern American life has had upon both Jews and Judaism is best demonstrated by the unfortunate schism that has been introduced by us into what was once an organic, integral, unified, and complete Jewish way of life. That schism or break is the dualism we have developed between "Judaism" and "Jewishness." From two different sources was this dichotomy encouraged and propagated, and both tended to contribute to the breakup of all Jewish life as a result.

The division of Jewish life into the purely religious and devotional on the one hand, and the religion-less, content-less complex of folkways, mannerisms, associations, social contacts, customs, sentiments, and the sense of Jewish solidarity on the other, has proven extremely damaging to both. And I believe it most fitting to discuss with you, briefly, this very topic on this, the last Friday night late service of this year, and one which is dedicated to Bnai Brith.

The first heresy was that which lifted out of Jewish life a number of abstract religious principles, named them Judaism, and denied validity to any other aspect of Jewish life. Historically, this began with early Reform and is still kept up by some straggling remnants of Reform who have not progressed with their own movement. Nowadays it finds its organized expression in that band of unreconstructed Jewish antisemites known as the American Council for Judaism. Early Reform discounted Zionism as a parochial, narrow, nationalistic movement which was only a relic from the time that Jews were clannish. It was, to them, part of the "Jewishness" that they tried so hard to dissociate themselves from. What relationship, other than a purely formal one or historical one, did they have with Israel? It was only, they maintained, a sentimental vestige, a way of talking that had no longer any real validity. For one could be a Jew by professing

certain principles and going to Temple. Yiddish and Hebrew were subjected to the same treatment – they were laughed out of existence. Kashruth, no longer regarded as part of "Judaism," the religious pole, was not, of course, tenable as part of Jewishness – it was only a peculiarity of Jewish diet, like the expression "oy" or "nebech," that was unimportant and should be scrapped with all else that was merely "Jewishness" in the attempt to become, as they called it, "universal," but which really meant quasi-Christian. All customs that were peculiar to Jews, to the Jewish people, all the beautiful traditions which were not part of the minimal religion they preempted, were regarded as clannish parts of the ghetto and condemned as unfit for either modern German or modern American Jewish life.

I need not attempt to convince those here tonight of the terrible fallacy involved in this disgracing of everything other than the few noble "prophetic" principles they embraced. Without the sense of solidarity amongst all Jews, what hope could there be for the survival of even a few of the great ideals that grew from the society of Jews? G-d made us a nation before he gave us the Torah – true, without the Torah, we have no real life as a nation. But it is equally true that there is no Torah without Israel. The peoplehood of Israel is not a narrow-minded archaism. It is an absolute prerequisite for our religious beliefs. Remember that no other people was given the Torah. Others have their religious scriptures, but only one people developed the Torah, the Bible. If Jewishness, with all the folkways and associations and sentiments it implies, were not essential and vital for Judaism, then the Torah might as well have been given to the Chinese or Indians or Greeks or Australian bushmen. Community consciousness, and the "Jewishness" that that implies, when separated from the purely religious abstractions, leaves those religious ideals, that "Judaism," as a spirit without a body – a ghost.

But if "Judaism" without "Jewishness" is a ghost, then

“Jewishness” without “Judaism” is a body without a spirit – in other words, a corpse. And dress up a corpse however you will, it remains a cold, lifeless, spiritless relic.

And it is here, friends, that most American Jews have sinned. They have held onto this “Jewishness” as a drowning man grasps the air – but have overlooked the real lifeline which is Torah, or Judaism, the religion of Israel. We have taken this precious Jewishness and embraced it so tight that we have squeezed the “*neshamah*,” Torah, out of it, and, having strangled it, we remain with the corpse – Jewishness without Judaism.

What are some of the expressions of this beheaded Jewishness? In its organized forms, you find movements such as the Yiddishist group. It may be true that Yiddish is only a jargon of primarily Hebrew and middle German plus a dozen other influences. It may be true that its literature is not as extensive as that of English or Hebrew. But is genuinely, thoroughly, and beautifully expressive of the inner Jew. It should be studied and spoken and advanced. But when it is taken per se, as the summum bonum of Jewish life, when the totality of Jewish experience is narrowed to a language spoken for only three or four hundred years, and that not by all Jews by any means, then this “Jewishness” is nothing more than an eccentricity. The Yiddishist who denies Torah and Judaism is like he who asserts that the totality of America lies in Brooklyn slang or ice cream or king-size filter-tipped cigarettes. It is mistaking the part for the whole and thus effectively killing off both the parts and the whole.

The Hebrew movement is not free from the same criticism. If it remains a passion for the language as it is, with no commitment for any higher goal or ideal, if it is a one-sided expression of Jewishness without Judaism, then it too is nothing more than an academic quirk. I was never more convinced of this fact that when several years ago I met one of the most celebrated Hebraists in the country, famed writer in “*HaDoar*,” and as I left, gave me his calling card: “*ani eved le’Ivrit*”.... It is awkward, lopsided, even idolatrous. I told him: “*ani eved la’shem*.”

I could – as could you – mention dozens other such examples of attempts to live full Jewish life in one aspect of Jewishness without Judaism, such as: secular zionism, philanthropy, anti-defamation, Jewish scholarship, etc.

But, more important than isolated examples is the general tendency so many of us have evolved, of embracing almost all facets of Jewishness while neglecting Judaism. Of course, that religion without a G-d, called “Reconstructionism,” has made a philosophy of this

attitude which so many American Jews adopt without thinking. It gives religious value to all folk customs and sentiments. It is only when you embrace Jewishness while expelling Judaism that you can, as does the high priest of Reconstructionism, Mordecai Kaplan, maintain that it is perfectly valid to have a kosher home while eating treifah outside. Many Jews may do it as a matter of convenience, which is bad enough, but when you make a philosophy of it, then you have bowed to an idol and rebelled against G-d. It is in this spirit that many of our fellow Jews find the totality of their Jewish experience in gefilte fish (gastronomical Judaism), in a “*shvitz*,” in Yiddish or Jewish jokes, in having mostly Jewish friends or in going to Jewish hotels. If this trend should continue, then Jewishness itself must sooner or later vanish, then assimilation is the only outlook, then we shall become a clan instead of a people, a dialect without a language, glitter without gold.

I, for one, cannot bring myself to believe that this will be the fate of American Jewry. I cannot believe it, because it implicitly have faith that the fate of Torah is not obscurity; because I believe that Jewishness itself ultimately inspires Judaism; and because I have a great deal of confidence in the American Jew and believe that he will soon wake up to the fact that it is futile, eerie, and ridiculous to go about dancing with a painted up corpse.

No, in the heart of every one of us is a deep yearning, sometimes undetected, inarticulate, and unacknowledged, a yearning and longing to transcend ourselves, to go beyond ourselves. There is deep within us a profound awareness of the mystery of life, of its unspeakable wonder, of the ineffable and the holy. There is an attraction to the glory that has pulsed through the arteries of Jewish life throughout the centuries; there is an attraction for the divine and the noble and the holy; there is a restlessness that is native to our souls, a gasping for spirituality, and anxiety for the permanent and the eternal, and a quest for G-d that sometimes, even if rarely, suddenly illuminates our lives like lightning flashing across heavily overcast skies.

Unless and until these two tendencies, for Judaism and for Jewishness, are reunited and reintegrated into one indivisible totality, American Jewry must suffer from a spiritual and cultural lopsidedness, and possess neither a genuine Judaism nor authentic Jewishness. It is for this goal of reunification of Judaism and Jewishness, of religion and culture, soul and body, center and periphery, that Bnai Brith and other such organizations must strive if they are to contribute worthily to the perpetuation and survival

of Jewish life. Bezalel, the builder of the tabernacle about whom we read in tomorrow's sidra, is an excellent model to emulate in this regard. Adding to the glowing eulogy of him in the torah, our sages mention the significant encomium that "Bezalel yada le'tzareif osios she'ba'hem nivr'u shamayim va'aretz," that he had the genius and knack for reuniting the letters with which G-d created heaven and earth. That must be the function of all social and communal Jewish organizations which remain loyal to Jewry. We must reunite the heavenly and earthly elements, the divine inspiration and the human aspirations, soul and sentiment, culture and custom, the heavenly ideals and principles of Judaism with the earthy and charming ways of Jewishness.

Until recently, Bnai Brith has devoted its money, talent, and time to such aspects of Jewishness as preserving the sense of Jewish solidarity through social activity, and protecting Jewish integrity and life through its anti-defamation work. No one can, may, does, or should underrate this work. But – we must be frank – there always was a fear, an apprehension, in my heart and in the hearts of many others, that this overattention to Jewishness, to the elements of earth, of just physical survival, was done at expense of the heavenly elements, of Judaism. Again to be perfectly honest, that fear has not altogether disappeared. I am sometimes plagued with this feeling that this secularist

tendency is deeply ingrained. Yet I have sufficiently convinced myself of a change in Bnai Brith's outlook to join your ranks this year as a member of the Sholom lodge. I am impressed not so much by our accomplishments as by our goals and enthusiasm in the adult education ventures of Bnai Brith. As long as Jews will learn, I know that they will think. And if they will think, then I have no fears as to the future of Judaism – all depending, of course, on how deeply or superficially they think. But it is this step more than anything else, this first attempt at reunifying and reuniting both halves into one organic whole, that gives me satisfaction, confidence and hope – and, now as a member, pride in Bnai Brith.

When Adam was first created, our Bible tells us, he was a "golem," both in the original Hebrew sense meaning a mute form, and in the later sense of a robot or dummy. Only when the Lord breathed his own breath into him did he become a man, a human. Jewishness is our body. But alone it remains a "golem." Let us aspire to G-d's inspiration, let us inhale from the clear draughts of the atmosphere of torah, and we shall have produced a true, living, immortal organism – the Jewish way of life, which survived so many thousands of years of turbulent history and, with our help, shall remain imperishable.

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A Place To Go

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

After the people completed the construction of the mishkan, Moshe saw that they had done it according to all that God had commanded him, and blessed them. Rashi says that the blessing he gave was: "May the divine presence rest on the work of your hands" (Shemos 39:44, and Rashi there). A number of commentators explain this to mean that the divine presence, which, as God has promised, would dwell in the mishkan, would also dwell, as a consequence, or the daily work that people did in their own lives. The commentator Shemen HaTov adds that this effect of the mishkan, elevating the mundane things in one's life, applies to character traits as well. This is seen, he says, through the example of the tzitz, the golden head band worn on the forehead of the kohein gadol as one of the priestly garments. The Talmud says that the tzitz atones for brazenness. This means that arrogance, at times, can be elevated, used at times in the service of God. This process

of elevation, he says, applies to other character traits, as well. However, following the midrash, there seems to be one negative trait to which this process does not apply.

The Midrash Rabbah to parshas Pekudei says that there was a 'kipas hacheshbonos', a charter of calculations, outside of Yerushalayim, where people would go to the make their financial calculations. This was because such calculations can often lead us to sadness, and a person is supposed to be happy in Yerushalayim, which is described in Tehillim as the joy of the world. Why was it so important to be happy in Yerushalayim? Why couldn't the character trait of sadness be elevated? Rav Kook, in his Oros HaKodesh (3, 243), writes that all character traits can be elevated except for that of 'atzvus', sadness, or depression, which is rooted in anger, arrogance, or worrying in general. Only through elevating the root causes of sadness can the symptom, along with its roots, be resolved.

In a recently published work (Pinkas 13) Rav Kook

further says that any sadness in the world comes only because a person does not truly wish to do the will of God. If this is the case, one may ask, why is it specifically discouraged in Yerushalayim? Perhaps we can explain this on the basis of a remark by Rav Yosef Albo in his sefer HaIkkarim, in which he says that a person is happy when he acts according to the nature of his soul. The Rambam, in his Laws of Divorce, chapter two, says that it is the nature of a Jew to wait to do the mitzvos. Someone, then, who is in a state of sadness, is demonstrating that he is not happy with what he is doing, and doesn't feel that it is part of his nature. Yerushalayim, according to the Ramban, is an extension of the mikdash, the place in the world where a person can come closest to God, performing the

mitzvos connected to that holy place. Exhibiting sadness in that environment, then, reflects the kind of attitude that Rav Kook describes. The mishkan, in fact, came as an atonement for the eigel, and the aspect of that sin that led Moshe to break the luchos, was, as pointed out by some commentators, the fact that he saw the people dancing before their idol. This demonstration of happiness while acting in way contradicting the entire Torah reflected a transformation of Jewish nature, which is to find happiness in doing God's will. Perhaps that is why, in Yerushalayim, in its status as an extension of the mikdash, which is where one's Jewish nature can best emerge, sadness is discouraged.

Remember Who You Are

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally entitled, Parsha Bytes - Pekudei 5779, and presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on March 7, 2019)

In Parshas Tetzaveh, Hashem gave a tzivui to create Bigdei Kehuna, and now, in Parshas Pekudei, we read about how Bnei Yisroel actually made them. The Torah also repeats the two precious gems on the Eiphod of the Kohen Gadol, engraved with the names of shivtei Bnei Yisroel. *Va-yasem osam al kisfos ha-eiphod avnei zikaron li-vnei Yisra'el ka'asher tzivah Hashem es Moshe.* These are Avnei Zikaron—remembrance stones—for Bnei Yisrael. So the question is: Who are they meant for, exactly? And many meforshim answer: Hashem. Earlier in Parshas Tetzaveh, Rashi says: Hashem remembers all the shvatim and how much He loves Klal Yisroel. It obviously presents a philosophical challenge, as Hashem doesn't forget anything so that He would need a reminder. Yet, on a metaphorical level, we can understand this.

However, there are other perushim as well. Abarbanel suggests that the remembrance is not for Hashem, Who remembers everything just fine. Rather, it was for the Kohen Gadol. You know, being a Kohen Gadol could easily go to your head. The Kohen Gadol is the holiest and perhaps the most important person in all of Klal Yisroel. The Mishnayos in Horayos teach us how he takes precedence because of his chashivus. And therefore, the Kohen Gadol must remember that he's not there for himself because he's better than anyone else. Abarbanel says that *Avnei zikaron le-Vnei Yisroel* remind the Kohen Gadol that he should always worry about Bnei Yisroel. He's there to always daven for Bnei Yisroel. He shouldn't think he's there to be a holy guru and connect to Hashem just for

himself.

The Meshech Chochma, though, says something very fascinating. He compares the lashon that we have in Parshas Korach: *Zikaron li-Vnei Yisroel lema'an asher lo yikrav ish zar, etc.*, where *zikaron li-Vnei Yisroel* means a reminder for the Jews, not about them. How does it remind us? After all, the Kohen Gadol wears these gems with the names of Bnei Yisroel inside the Beis Ha-Mikdash. I understand how it reminds Hashem—it's his house! I understand how it reminds the Kohen Gadol—it's on his clothing. But how does it remind Bnei Yisroel? So the Meshech Chochma says a very important idea. It's a reminder for us of how chashuv we are, that the names of our Shvatim are written on these precious gems that the Kohen Gadol wears in front of Hashem. And it's not just about expensive gems and fancy clothing. The designer's name is also on fancy clothing. No. Our names go in the *Beis Ha-Mikdash, lifnai v'lifnim*. That's what Hashem wants to see in His Holy Beis Ha-Mikdash. And the Meshach Chochma proves this from a Gemora in Sotah (36b). When Yosef was about to sin with Eishes Potifar, he suddenly imagined the image of his father saying to him (or alternatively, he said to himself): your name, along with all Shvatim, will be engraved on the Eiphod. Do you want your name to be erased and counted with the prutzim—the ro'ei zonos? When Yosef realized how chashuv he was because his name would be on the Eiphod of the Kohen Gadol, he said: No! I'm above that! This pritzus of Eishes Potifar is not for me. I'm on the Avnei Choshen. I'm

too chashuv to do such a thing. And that's the meaning of zikaron li-Vnei Yisroel.

And we can add that it's fascinating that these stones are specifically on Aharon ha-Kohen's garments. The pasuk says about Aharon ha-Kohen: *Ve-rabim heshiv me'avon*. He was the first *machzir be-teshuvah* in Klal Yisroel after the giving of the Torah. How did Aharon ha-Kohen accomplish this? When he saw someone doing something wrong, he didn't approach the guy and start yelling. He didn't give him a Mussar schmooze—a potch in the punim. So what did he do? When Aharon saw someone doing something wrong, when he saw a ba'al aveirah, he went over and put his arm around him. He didn't say anything about any aveiros. He just spent time in the company of this fellow. He was mekarev this person to his inner circle. And after a while, the Gemora tells us, this fellow would say to himself: You know, I'm not just a regular guy. I'm a close friend of Aharon ha-Kohen. For someone like me, in the inner circle of Aharon ha-Kohen, it's pas-nisht to do these aveiros. I'm too chashuv. I have to stop doing these aveiros. People did teshuva just because Aharon was machshiv them so much. And that's how Meshech Chochma understood the meaning of *avnei zikaron li-vnei Yisra'el*. Some people do aveiros because they are *ba'alei ga'avah*—they think they're so great and can do whatever they want. But it seems that only a few people do aveiros for this reason. Usually, the reason is the opposite. They don't realize how chashuv they are. They say: Who am I? I'm just some guy. What difference does it make if I do one more aveirah or one less aveira? I might as well listen to my yeitzer ha-ra and have a good time. And that's exactly why the Torah says *zikaron li-Vnei Yisra'el*. Because it's not true! In the outside world, you're might not be very chashuv. If you're not rich and famous, related to the President or the Prime Minister, or in the newspapers, then you're not chashuv. But in our world—in the Torah world—everyone's chashuv. Each of us comes from these Shevatim. Hashem had our names engraved on the Choshen and the Ephod. Each of us is chashuv because our names come *lifnai u'lifnim*.

At the beginning of Parshas Shemos, Rashi tells us that Hashem counts the names of every single Jew. They are as precious to Him as the kochavim—the stars. And here I am, thinking: Who cares if there is one more or one less

Jew? Who cares about me? What's the difference? There are plenty of other Jews left to keep the Torah. No! That's not the way Hashem looks at the world. Every Jew is a star. Hashem put you here because He has a tafkid for you that only you can fulfill.

And regarding aveiros, how does Rambam say we should do teshuva? Everyone should view themselves every day, every moment, as if the entire world is exactly 50/50, balanced on the scale—50% good, 50% bad. If my next action is a mitzvah, the whole world will be considered righteous and merit salvation. And if it's an aveirah, chas ve-shalom, it leads the entire world to destruction. You might say: What a Ba'al Ga'ava! Who am I to be the only one who gets to decide the fate of the world—that it depends on me? Says the Rambam: Yes! That's the meaning of *avnei zikaron*. We must remember that every ma'aseh we do has an effect. And you never know if Hashem sent you here to resist your yeitzer ha-ra, abstain from this aveirah, do an extra mitzvah, to go the extra mile, to overcome our laziness, etc. And you never know exactly when your mitzvah will make a difference to the whole world. And even if your mitzvah doesn't make a difference for the world, it makes a difference to Hashem because we're so precious that He thinks of us, counts us, and is machshiv us all the time. And maybe that's the whole point of the Mishkan. What, Hashem needs a house? Are the Shomayim and Shmei ha-Shomayim not big enough? No, we need the Mishkan for us. We're so chashuv that Hashem wants to live with us, and not with the Olamos ha-Elyonim, with all their angels and spiritual beings.

And we must remember how chashuv we are every moment of the day and bring the message to the entire Jewish people. I don't care how frum you are. I don't care how learned you are. I don't care how rich and famous you are. I don't care how successful you are or what your reputation is. Everyone is chashuv. Hashem is looking at every Jew as a gem, inscribing the name of every Jew in his Kisei ha-Kavod. If you only realize how chashuv you are, you would really change everything in your life. And it's our tafkid to go out there like Aharon ha-Kohen and remind everyone of how chashuv we are in the eyes of Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom.

Positive Accomplishments

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

Parshat Pekudei celebrates the culmination of the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. After several lengthy chapters delineating the structural instructions and subsequent creation of the Tabernacle and vessels, the verse reports that “all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting was completed” (Ex 39:32). The verses explicitly state three times towards the end of chapter 29, that the Israelites did “just as God commanded” (Ex. 39:32, 39:42, 39:43). Moses reflected on the Mishkan’s implementation and the grandeur of the finished product and then blessed the Israelites. Gersonides notes that Moses behaved as a moral exemplar; a leader should always praise his people’s accomplishments. By doing so, he or she fosters a healthy sense of pride, which also enhances motivation for future success.

Celebrating accomplishments is an important value in human growth. In formulating his vision for the psychology of flourishing, Dr. Martin Seligman offered the acronym PERMA to represent five important areas related to happiness and well-being. “P” stands for positive emotions, “E” for engagement, “R” for relationships, “M” for meaning, and “A” represents accomplishment. Focusing on the latter, Pninit Russo-Netzer and Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar point out that accomplishment that leads to psychological flourishing is not about attainment of external rewards or the seeking of recognition from others, but “focuses on achievements that nurture the self and others academically, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually” (*Positive Education*, 2015). It is this type of intrinsic and holistic accomplishment that generates happiness.

Exploring the commentaries related to the completion of the Tabernacle, we are left with an inspiring model of accomplishment that parallels positive psychology’s meaningful conceptualization of the construct.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch directly connects the

completion of the Tabernacle with happiness and well-being. Moses celebrated two important elements. First was the fact that “they had made it” (Ex 39:43). Everyone had an active role in its development. Each individual’s personality, devotion, and voluntary enthusiasm formed a broader, more cohesive collective. Second was the dedication and commitment to Divine command. Fulfilling the Divine will with such devotion, writes Rabbi Hirsch, leads one to an ultimate sense of unparalleled happiness, fulfillment, and moral elevation.

Noticing the nuanced shift in terminology from two words that mean work: *avodah* in verse 42, and *melakha* in verse 43, Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik distinguishes between the two types of work that were necessary in the construction of the Tabernacle. *Avodah* reflects the mindset and output of a servant. There is no space for creativity or individuality. To succeed in *avodah* obedience is necessary. *Melakha*, however, “embodies the personality” of the worker. It entails autonomy and encourages individuality.

The successful balancing of this dialectic warranted celebration. There was both devotional *avodah* along with creative *melakha*. Moses encouraged contributions of the heart fueled by intrinsic motivation accompanying individualistic artistic and aesthetic capabilities. And he also continually reinforced doing “just as God commanded.”

By analyzing the celebration of this remarkable achievement, we are left with a powerful formula for fulfillment and flourishing. Working towards meaningful achievements that utilize our whole selves, uniting to form a powerful social collective, while also fulfilling the will of God can lead to happiness. Moses praised the completion of the Tabernacle; this should inspire us to strive for and rejoice in the accomplishment of our goals and the goals of others.

Day Eight: Sound and Cloud

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Perhaps the most powerful sensory experience in Judaism is the *korban*; surrounded by the sights and scents of spiritual and ritual devotion, we immerse ourselves in an environment of dedication to Hashem. However, on two occasions that experience is augmented by a particular sound: the formal recitation of a set of

biblical instructions.

- One occasion is the annual Yom Kippur service. The Kohen Gadol’s deeds are accompanied by a public reading of their biblical instructions (Mishnah Yoma 7:1).
- The other was a one-time event, the eighth day of the

miluim. Moshe served in the Mishkan for the first seven days, and on Day Eight the kohanim initiated their service. Their rituals were accompanied by a public recitation of the relevant biblical instructions (Yoma 5b).

According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Vayikra 9:6), the readings were to “establish these rituals as fulfillment of Divine commands. No element was invented by a human heart and its subjective feelings; the totality of these actions was dedicated to fulfillment of a Divine command.” But why only for these two events?

We might answer based on Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi's explanation of the sin of the Eigel (Kuzari 1:97). In his view, the makers of the golden calf intended to serve Hashem, but sinned by creating ritual sans Divine sanction: "Their sin was in making a form, which had been prohibited to them, and ascribing the Divine element to that which they had made with their hands and desire, without a Divine command."

Mishkan, Lessons in Unity

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Pekudei, an accounting is given of all the materials collected for the Mishkan. Hashem commands Moshe regarding the ha'kamas ha"Mishkan, which is to take place on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, in the second year from the Exodus from Egypt. The Torah then describes the creation and building of the Mishkan, in all its glory and beauty.

Sefer Shemos ends by telling us that the goal of the Bnei Yisrael - building a Sanctuary for G-d to dwell in their midst - has been reached:

and the Cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan ... בְּיָמָיו הָיָה עָלָיו עֲנַן יוֹמָם, וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לִּלְנָח, for the Cloud of Hashem was upon the Mishkan by day, and a Fire upon it by night, before the eyes of the entire House of Israel, in all their journeys (Shemos 40:34, 38).

The pasukim delineate the making of the bigdei Kehunah (priestly garments). In regard to the shoulder straps worn by the Kohen Gadol, two stones, set in golden settings, were upon the shoulder straps. These stones were engraved with the names of the tribes; six tribal names engraved upon each stone. וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת-אֲבְנֵי הַשֹּׁהַם, מִסֶּבֶת מִשְׁבַּצֹּת זָהָב, מִפְתָּחוֹת. *And they made the shoham stones, enclosed in gold settings, engraved like the engravings of a seal, with the names of the Bnei Yisrael* (Shemos 39:6).

And in regard to the breastplate worn by the Kohen

Creativity can be beautiful, but the bedrock value of a mitzvah is its expression of loyalty to Hashem.

This is why we emphasize that our Yom Kippur rituals fulfill Divine commands. On the first Yom Kippur we completed our atonement for that independent Eigel, and received the second set of luchot.

This is also why the eighth day of the miluim required these readings. According to Ramban (Vayikra 9:3), Day Eight was instituted to atone for the Eigel. And as Ramban writes (Shemot 40:2), Hashem's presence was not manifest for the first seven days of the miluim. The Divine cloud covered the ohel moed only on the eighth day, signaling the acceptance of Aharon's korbanot and his atonement for the Eigel. On this day we showed that we had learned to define ritual by Divine instruction.

May we remember the loyalty underpinning our mitzvot, and merit a Day Eight of our own.

Gadol, which he donned over his apron, it was decorated with twelve precious gems, each stone set in a golden setting, and each stone was engraved with the names of one of the tribes of Israel. וְהָאֲבָנִים עַל-שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה, שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר--עַל-שְׁמֹתָם: פְּתוּחֵי חֹתָם אִישׁ עַל-שְׁמוֹ, לְשָׁנִים עֶשֶׂר שָׁבֶט - *And the stones were for the names of the Bnei Yisrael twelve, corresponding to their names; like the engravings of a seal, every one according to his name, for the twelve tribes (39:14).*

An integral part of the construction of the Mishkan was the lesson that all of Am Yisrael is one. We must be a united and loving people in order to properly serve Hashem, and in order to merit Divine benevolence (Yoma 9b, was the second Temple destroyed?). Hence, each one of the names of the twelve tribes, despite how different each tribe was from each other, was engraved upon the stones of the bigdei Kehunah. If one stone, or one name, was theoretically missing, the garments were incomplete and the service would be invalidated. For only when we come together as one, can we come before G-d, and only then will our service be pleasing to Him.

Furthermore, in regard to the ketores spice mixture (eleven spices offered twice daily on the Golden Altar), the pasuk commands that the spice of חֶלְבֵּנָה be included in the ketores. Since this was a foul smelling spice, Chazal question why it was included at all. Rashi explains: לְלַמְּדֵנוּ שְׁלֹא יִקַּל בְּעֵינֵינוּ לְצַרֵּר עֲמָנוּ בְּאַגְדַּת תַּעֲנִיּוֹתֵינוּ וּתְפִלּוֹתֵנוּ אֶת פּוֹשְׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיְהִי נִמְנֵן עִמָּנוּ - *to teach us that it should not be light in*

our eyes to include in our fast days and prayers the sinners of Israel, that they should be included with us (Rashi to Shemos 30:34). Once again, we see that HKB”H wants all of His children to come together as one.

And in regard to the keruvim that graced the kapores (the cover) of the aron kodesh, the Torah describes their position, not as ‘one facing another’, but rather, פְּנֵיהֶם, אִישׁ, אֶל-אָחִיו, and their faces, one man to his brother (37:9). If we want to be a vessel where the Shechina dwells, as was the aron kodesh, we must always be facing, and reaching towards, one Jew to his brother.

In a recent Mishpacha magazine, Gedalia Guttentag wrote, “Twice in the last few weeks, I’ve walked down the ramp in Ben-Gurion Airport leading to departures, and twice the same sad thought has occurred to me. In place of the sunny images of Israeli life that the country normally displays to its departing visitors, travelers now walk past photos of the Gaza captives. It’s a depressing reminder that the country’s national story is now one of war and tragedy.

“But while that’s certainly true, a perceptive visitor will see another storyline. Like the proverbial non-Jew who puts on a yarmulke when he has a flat tire, knowing that some Jew will stop to help, outsiders know that when the chips are down, Jewish unity asserts itself.

“And here’s the amazing thing. It’s been decades since the Jewish body politic has done anything to give meaning

to the term “Klal Yisrael.” In what substantive way are we really an am, or klal? When two million religious Jews celebrate the daf yomi mega-Siyum every seven years, secular Jews are simply oblivious. When they in turn celebrate a Jewish Hollywood actor or Olympian, the reverse is true. So when do we all collectively feel or experience the same thing at the same time?

“That was all pre-October 7. Ask any Jew anywhere how he is, and there will be a hint of reserve. “Given the situation, okay,” will be the answer — a hesitation that only Jews will truly understand.

“For the first time in many decades, there is now one Jewish world, a certain minimal sense of Jewish consciousness. “Behold, a people that dwells alone,” said Bilaam, looking at the serried ranks of tents in the desert. From the tents of Beit Shemesh and the battlegrounds of Gaza, to anywhere that Jews are saying Tehillim after Shacharis, a hazy, faint outline of that people is now on display” (Mishpacha Issue 1002, March 6, 2024, p.54).

May we merit to come together as one, with loving kindness and a warm embrace, one man to his brother. לָךְ בְּנוֹס אֶת-כָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן - as the Jews in Shushan gathered together to pray for Divine salvation (Esther 4:16), and in that merit, they were saved, may we too band together as one, which will surely elicit Divine mercy and compassion in our favor, b’karov mamash.

Rav Soloveitchik on Pekudei: Hosting the Holy One

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from *Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters* (Ktav, 2023)

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was once asked to speak at an intimate sheva berachot, the postnuptial celebrations. He began as follows: “How should a religious couple furnish their new home? And I don’t mean the physical space or the furniture. I refer to the spiritual makeup of the house.” He went on to propose that the simplest model to follow is that of the Mishkan, the house of God.

Three of its holiest components are mentioned together in Parashat Terumah—the ark, the table, and the menorah—while a fourth, the golden incense altar, is left for Parashat Tetzaveh. The first grouping indicates some commonality, and Ibn Ezra suggests that these three are the basic elements of a home: a place to rest (the ark),¹ a table for eating (the showbread table), and a source of light (the menorah).² The Mishkan, therefore, is not only a place to offer sacrifices, but a location in our midst in which God

can reside, where we can feel His proximity.

If “the Tabernacle can transform into a house,” the Rav reasoned, “the private house of the Jew can transform into a Tabernacle.” The Rav now turned to the bride and groom: How do we accomplish this and host God in our home?

*We welcome God into our homes through establishing... the bed, the table, the chair and the lamp. Homiletically, the bed represents family purity, the table represents keeping kosher as well as the mitzvah of welcoming guests, while the menorah represents the study of Torah... And in such a spiritually furnished home, one can hear the voice of God as in the Mishkan: “I will arrange My meetings with you there, and I will speak with you from atop the ark cover” (Exodus 25:22). In such a sanctuary, the Shechinah indeed finds a place to dwell.*³

The many facets and features of the Mishkan are meant to inspire a Jew to bring holiness and God’s presence into our own lives.⁴

Mishkan of the Heart

The Rav's eminent forebear, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, stated that the well-known verse, "they shall make Me a Temple so that I might dwell (וַשְׁכְּנֵתִי) in their midst (בְּתוֹכָם)" (Exodus 25:8), indicates that the divine presence (שְׁכִינָה) is intended to be manifest within (בְּתוֹךְ) each Jew. The verse does not say He will dwell within the Temple but "in their midst," or, more literally, "within them." He continued:

The main purpose of the sacred and the Temple and the resting of the divine presence is man. For if he sanctifies himself properly by fulfilling all of the commandments... then he himself becomes the actual Temple, and within him is God. As it says, "The Temple (הַיְכָל) of God, the Temple of God, are these" (Jeremiah 7:4).⁵

This interpretation of the verse also features in the writings of the Malbim. In a lengthy treatment of the Mishkan's symbolism, he noted that the verse following "they shall make Me a Temple" ends with "and so shall you make" (Exodus 25:9). He explained:

He commanded "and so shall you make," that everyone should build a Temple in the chambers of their heart, preparing themselves to be a Temple for God and an abode for His mighty presence. [...] This should also be followed for generations to come: everyone should build a Temple in the chambers of their heart and prepare an altar to offer up all the parts of their soul to God, to the extent that they sacrifice their soul for His glory at all times.⁶

Rabbi Elazar Azikri, the kabbalist best known for his liturgical poem "Yedid Nefesh," composed a poem that includes the line, "Inside my heart I will build a Mishkan for His splendor, my only soul shall offer Him a sacrifice." Based on this line, the famous rosh yeshiva of Chaim Berlin and original thinker Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906–1980) composed the beautiful song known as Bilvavi. This song eloquently and figuratively expresses the Temple of divine service located within the heart:

*In my heart I will build a mishkan, for the beauty of His honor.
In the mishkan I will place an altar for the rays of His splendor.
For an eternal light, I will take for myself the fire of the Akedah,*

And as a sacrifice I will offer Him my only soul.

בְּלִבִּי מִשְׁכַּן אֶבְנָה, לְהֵדָר כְּבוֹדוֹ.
וּבְמִשְׁכַּן מִזְבֵּחַ אֲשִׁים, לְקַרְנֵי הוֹדוֹ.
וּלְנֵר תָּמִיד אֶקַּח לִי אֶת אֵשׁ הָעֶקְדָּה,
וּלְקָרְבַּן אֶקְרִיב לוֹ אֶת נַפְשִׁי הַיְחִידָה.

Exploring the Rav's Insight

Rabbi Menachem Genack, an eminent student of the Rav, explores his teacher's theme and brings us back to the first Jewish home in our history. Sarah's household had three hallmarks: an everlasting flame, a blessed dough, and a cloud above.⁷ These three phenomena fascinatingly parallel three miracles that occurred in the Temple: the western candle of the menorah remained lit throughout the week; the showbread on the table remained fresh for the entire week; and a cloud perpetually hovered over the Temple.

Our contemporary homes, teaches Rabbi Genack, are likewise marked by three mitzvot closely identified with the woman of the home: lighting Shabbat candles, tithing the dough, and observing family purity.⁸ In the same way that God was present in the home of our Matriarch Sarah—a home devoted like a Temple to God's service—we can induce God to visit, and even stay, in our own home by making it a proper furnished abode for Him.⁹

1. The divine presence would rest on the ark, as it says that God "dwells upon the cherubs" on top of the ark (2 Samuel 6:2, 1 Chronicles 13:6).
2. See Ibn Ezra on Exodus 25:22 (long commentary). The Rav finds proof for this homemaking triad in 2 Kings 4:10, when the Shunamite woman set up a spare guest room for the prophet Elisha: "Let's make a room in the attic, and set up for him a bed, a table, and a lamp, so whenever he comes to us he will have a place to stay."
3. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 2:247. See further Schachter, Divrei ha-Rav, 139–142.
4. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 2:225.
5. Nefesh ha-Chayim, pt. 1, ch. 4.
6. Malbim on Exodus 25:8. See further his Artzot ha-Shalom, §3.
7. Rashi on Genesis 24:67.
8. See Shabbat 32a.
9. Birkat Yitzchak, 260.

Four Testimonies

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The mishkan was an ambitious project designed to craft a house of Hashem on Earth. The mishkan hosted daily korbanot, was the scene of national assembly, and was the epicenter for the devar Hashem and

divine communication.

It also voiced a testimony. The Torah designates the mishkan as a mishkan ha'eidut, or a house of testimony. Beyond enabling religious rites, it testified to truths which,

previously, had been unclear or under dispute.

We were selected by Hashem to represent Him in a dark and confused world. After two centuries of brutal slavery and merciless persecution we were liberated through supernatural miracles. A few weeks later, we stood beneath a blazing mountain, receiving His word, and pledged to live by His will.

Shockingly, just a few weeks later we betrayed our faith and fashioned an egel. After months of tefillah and teshuvah Hashem forgave us and requisitioned the construction of His house. The mishkan testified to the possibility of forgiveness. We take this concept for granted, but ancient Man could not imagine divine forgiveness. The sanctuary confirmed that Hashem desired penitence and accepts human apology. It testified to Mankind that Hashem would forgive their failures.

Furthermore, the mishkan produced testimony about Jewish history. It announced that Hashem had not forsaken His people and that we were still chosen, despite our horrible misconduct. The mishkan testified that Jewish selection is enduring and capable of outlasting our moral betrayals.

Historical Testimony

Often, epic events reshape the arc of history, irreversibly affecting the human condition. Some events, however, aren't just dramatic and historically impactful but are also testimonial. These moments don't just relandscape history but also message humanity and message history. They aren't merely historical shifts but are historical testimonies which discredit popular perspectives and introduce new paradigms.

Legal testimony is registered in court and alters our prior perceptions of innocence or guilt. Historical testimony is registered in the human imagination and refutes faulty historical assumptions. At several crucial junctures, events in Jewish history testified against preconceived ideas. The sanctuary was the first historical testimony and it signaled that even after moral collapse we were still chosen.

The Second Testimony

950 years later the Purim episode provided a second historical testimony. A student of history, Haman understood that we were chosen by Hashem and had been privileged to extraordinary divine providence. He took a brave gamble, though, wagering that, after our first exile, we had forfeited that chosen status and were now similar to other nations. As he described it: [The Jews are] a nation "scattered and divided", living amongst other nations. His

genocidal plan fed off the popular conception that the Jews had surrendered their chosen status and had abandoned their destiny. Yerushalayim had been ransacked, the Mikdash had been incinerated, and we had been exiled from the land. Haman assumed that, at his stage of history, we had been discarded by Hashem and had become just as vulnerable as any other nation. With enough hatred and enough money, we could be erased from the map of humanity.

The Purim miracle debunked his malicious assumptions. Not only were we once chosen but we were still chosen. Despite our severe moral breakdowns and despite the trauma of being evicted from our homeland, Jewish destiny was still intact. Our chosen status could not only outlast sin, but could also survive exile.

The Third Testimony

Twenty-five hundred years later a third testimony became necessary. The holocaust was the most horrific atrocity in history. Never before had genocide been launched against an entire nation. Tragically, wars and natural disasters often devastated local populations, but never before was there a concerted and wholesale attempt to eradicate an entire race of people living in different countries and of vastly different ideological opinions. By launching his genocide, Hitler declared that the Jewish people didn't have the right to inhabit this Earth. Two millennia of Jewish suffering coupled with contemporary social and racial theories, appeared to support his murderous claim.

In the dismal aftermath of the Holocaust Jewish future seemed bleak. The Holocaust accredited the contention that we were a forsaken people condemned to slowly disappear or to gradually become assimilated into the general population. The Holocaust raised severe existential questions for which many people had no answers. After a lengthy exile and unspeakable suffering during the Holocaust, it appeared that Jewish history was cursed.

A few years later these gloomy predictions were rebutted. Our return to Israel and to Jewish sovereignty repudiated any notions that Jewish history had ended. Despite the confusion of exile and the chaos of the Holocaust, it was obvious that Hashem still cared for us, and that His ancient promises hadn't expired. In 1965, the Church officially reconciled with Judaism, recognizing us as the people of G-d and condemning any form of anti-Semitism. After thousands of years of persecution and after the disaster of the Holocaust, our return to Israel testified to our fiercest enemies that our people had an enduring role in the fate of Mankind. Not only would Jews survive but they would continue to shape civilization.

The Fourth Testimony

75 years after the third testimony, we are listening to the sound of the gradually emerging fourth testimony. It is obvious that this war is much more than a local geopolitical skirmish. It is also painfully obvious that the war isn't just being waged with a terrorist group or with a seething Arab world. A broad coalition of Israel haters lines up to protest our just and moral war. Many of these fuming protesters are just anti-Semitic opportunists using the current conflict as an excuse to spew hatred and death threats at us. Many are even explicit about their desire to rid the world of our people. They still haven't "received the message" of previous testimonies.

Many of the anti-Israel protestors though, do not contest our rights as a people, but are staunchly opposed to our rights to our land. To them this country never belonged to us, and we are nothing more than exploitative colonial invaders. The current cultural environment which has broadly condemned colonialism and has championed the rights of the oppressed appears to lend credibility to Israel haters. They naively and simplistically apply policies and viewpoints to our struggle to live peacefully in our homeland. This is the first time since the formation of Israel that its right to exist is being broadly challenged. The

phrase "from the River to the Sea" explicitly denies us any rights to our ancient homeland. Of course, the claim that Jews have the right to exist, but the state of Israel does not, is disingenuous. History has proven that without a Jewish homeland Jewish survival is tenuous, at best. However, Israel has the right to exist independent of its role in preserving Jewish survival. This is our ancient homeland which Hashem delivered to us. We are not exploitative colonizers but a peaceful nation returning home, seeking goodwill, and aspiring to share prosperity with our neighbors. This outcome of this struggle will provide the fourth testimony of history. The mishkan testimony reaffirmed Jewish selection even after our national sin. The Purim testimony reinforced Jewish selection even after exile. The State of Israel testimony verified Jewish destiny even after it had appeared to have faded through time and violently wrecked during the holocaust. The fourth testimony will affirm that not only are we Hashem's chosen, and not only is our destiny eternal, but that we have the right to live in our ancient homeland awarded to us by Hashem. The fourth testimony, like previous testimonies, will be entered into the annals of history. Like previous testimonies it will be violently opposed, until its opponents fade away and it enters collective human consciousness.

Building an Everlasting Sanctuary

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Pekudei, we are told that, at long last, all the work of the Tabernacle was completed. In Exodus 39:32, the Torah declares: וַתֵּכֶל כָּל עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁכַּן אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה, *And all the work of the Tabernacle—the Tent of Meeting, was completed, and the Children of Israel did everything that G-d commanded Moses, so they did.*

The chronology of the building of the Mishkan is as follows. According to tradition, it was on Yom Kippur that the people were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf, and G-d commanded Moses to construct the Tabernacle to achieve full atonement for that terrible sin. After Yom Kippur, Moses announced the campaign to gather the materials for the Tabernacle, and within two days the workmen began their work. Tradition (Yalkut, Kings 184) maintains that the Tabernacle was completed by the 25th of Kislev, (the future date of Chanukah), but the actual structure was not erected until more than three months later, on the first of Nissan, when it was inaugurated.

According to the Midrash (ibid.), when the skeptics

of the generation saw that the Tabernacle had been completed in Kislev and had not been erected, they began to cry: "Moses told us to contribute to the Tabernacle so that G-d's presence could dwell in it, and now the Tabernacle and all its parts are lying in some deserted corner! Perhaps the entire scheme was false, and Moses was simply trying to lead us astray!"

The Rabbis state, that G-d's decision to postpone erecting the Tabernacle until the first of Nissan was made in order to inaugurate the Mishkan on the very day that our forefather Isaac was born. This would allow the joy of the new Tabernacle to meld with the happiness of the birth of Isaac. After all, it is in the merit of Isaac, who was prepared to offer himself up to G-d on Mount Moriah, that the Al-mighty's spiritual presence descended upon the Jewish people. Furthermore, it was hoped that just as G-d showed compassion and spared Isaac at the Akeida, so too will G-d have compassion on His people and forgive them for their inappropriate actions.

Our commentators point out that the phrase, כָּל אֲשֶׁר

צִוָּה הַשֵּׁם אֶת מֹשֶׁה כֵּן עָשׂוּ, as G-d commanded Moses, so the people did, appears no less than 18 times in our parasha, underscoring the genuine feelings with which the people built the Tabernacle, preparing each part with a full heart and complete sincerity.

But as things generally go for the Jewish people, the erecting of the Tabernacle did not proceed smoothly.

In Exodus 39:33, Scripture informs us, וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת, הַמִּשְׁכָּן אֶל מֹשֶׁה, that the people brought the Tabernacle to Moses. The text, however, describes only the delivery of Tabernacle parts, not the fully erected Tabernacle: the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its planks, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, and many, many other parts from which the Tabernacle was fabricated. The rabbis ask: Normally a builder designs a building, assembles the pieces together and displays a completed product. Why then did the people bring all the structural pieces to Moses, rather than the fully assembled Tabernacle? If they were concerned that Moses would not permit them to assemble the pieces, they could have asked for permission.

One Midrashic approach suggests that when the People of Israel saw that the parts of the Tabernacle were completed, they actually approached the artisans and requested them to assemble the Tabernacle. But, as the skilled artisans assembled the structure, the parts immediately came tumbling down. The people then went to the chief designers, to Betzalel and Ohaliav, who also attempted to erect the Tabernacle, but their efforts too were unsuccessful. The skeptics of the generation again mocked Moses, saying that the Tabernacle would never be completed, since the Divine Presence refuses to dwell in it. That is when the people brought all the parts of the Tabernacle to Moses.

When Moses heard that the craftsmen and the architects were both unsuccessful in their efforts to erect the Tabernacle, he began to fret. G-d, however, told him not to worry, “I know that you, Moses, were concerned that you had not personally donated anything to the Tabernacle. That is why I made it impossible for anyone but you to erect the Tabernacle. They will now see that it all depends on you. And if you’re concerned about not having sufficient strength to erect the Tabernacle yourself, fear not, for I will help you. And even though the Tabernacle will really stand up by itself, I will write in the Torah that you, Moses, erected the Tabernacle!” And so, it is written

(Exodus 40:18), וַיָּקֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן, and Moses erected the Tabernacle!

When Moses saw that all the parts of the Tabernacle were prepared precisely the way G-d had instructed, Scripture reports, (Exodus 39:43), וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה, and Moses blessed them [the people]. According to tradition, cited by Rashi, Moses said to them, הֲיִי רָצוֹן שְׂתִשְׁרָה שְׂכִינָה בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיכֶם, “May the Divine Presence manifest itself in the work of your hands.” He then added the verse from Psalms 90:17, וַיְהִי נַעַם הַשֵּׁם אֶל־לַקְינוּ עֲלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ כִּוְנָה עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ כִּוְנָה, May the pleasantness of the L-rd our G-d be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it.

Although most commentators see this blessing as a blessing upon the work of the Tabernacle, the Divrei Asher (cited in *Otzar HaTorah*, p. 237) sees the words, וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ, our handiwork, as referring not to the work of the Tabernacle, but to ordinary daily labors performed by people. It was Moses’ wish that G-d’s Presence rest not only on the peoples’ sacred activities such as prayer, Torah study, and mitzvah performance, but even upon the peoples’ business and social activities!

According to the *Da’at Sofrim*, seeing the completed Tabernacle standing erect was one of the happiest moments of Moses’ life. It was one of the very few occasions when Moses truly rejoiced and felt fulfilled with his people. He therefore blessed them with a full heart.

Our rabbis teach that G-d’s promise to allow His Divine Presence to dwell among the Jewish people was not intended for the physical structure of the Tabernacle—the wood, the stones or the precious metals. G-d’s intention was that the Divine Presence literally dwell in the very bodies of the Jewish people. G-d hoped that His Presence in the Tabernacle would arouse in the hearts of people a desire for His closeness, and that the people would allow the Divine Presence to penetrate and sanctify their hearts, enabling them to be fully G-d fearing. That is what is meant by the words “Tabernacle” and “Sanctuary,” not a physical structure, but rather the hearts of the people!

Only if the people are worthy, will the sanctuary endure. That was the intention of Moses’ prayer: May it be Thy will that the Divine Presence dwell in all Your handiwork—may the Jewish people merit to see the Sanctuary standing firm, due to their worthiness, because they have earned it by sincerely embracing G-d.

The Most Important Audit

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Parshas Pekudei begins with the accounting that Moshe made of all the materials that were donated toward the construction of the Mishkan. The Torah lists the amounts of gold, silver and copper that Benei Yisrael donated, and specifies in detail what all these materials were used for. Moshe took the time to present a precise “audit,” showing that all the donations were used for the Mishkan. The Midrash relates – startlingly enough – that there were those who suspected Moshe of embezzling some of the riches donated toward the Mishkan, questioning his integrity as the administrator of this enormous project. To silence these cynical critics, Moshe went through the trouble of preparing a detailed record of how the materials were used, showing conclusively that none of it went mysteriously missing...

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in *Derash Moshe*, writes that the lesson conveyed in this section is to instruct that we must make an “accounting” of everything we have been given, and determine whether all these gifts are being used the right way. Hashem has given each and every of us so much – skills, talents, energy, resources, and time. He brings us into this world and grants us 70, 80, 90, or – hopefully – 120 – years of life. He gives us a great deal of time here in this world. Rav Moshe writes that it is a mistake to think that all these gifts, and all our years, are

for us to do with what we want, for us to use however we please. Hashem has brought each of us here for a specific mission, for a purpose, and He has given us all we have to enable us to fulfill that mission. Our time in this world was not given to us to spend watching Netflix, obsessing over the news, accumulating material luxuries, or indulging in gossip. Hashem gave us money, energy, skills and time so that we can build and nurture our relationship with Him, and so that we can make a meaningful, valuable contribution to the world. אלה פקדי המשכן. Just as Moshe made an accounting of all the materials brought to him for the construction of the Mishkan, so must we make an accounting of all the numerous precious “materials” that Hashem has given us, and determine whether they have all been properly utilized, or if perhaps some has been misappropriated.

Companies occasionally are required to undergo an audit, to have their books and spreadsheets carefully reviewed to make sure that all the money was handled properly. The most important “audit” that we must all make is the “audit” of our lives, of all the many blessings that Hashem has granted us. We need to regularly assess our use of these blessings, and think carefully to ascertain that we are using them all for the purpose we have received them.

Spiritual Upgrades & Downgrades

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

This Shabbat we read Parshat Pekudei which is the final parasha of Sefer Shemot and the last of the 5 parashiot focussing on the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), while next week we will begin Sefer Vayikra whose first 5 parashiot focus on the sacrifices that were offered up in the Mishkan.

With this in mind, I would like to share a stunning insight penned by Rav Re'em HaCohen (*Badei Ha'Aron* pp. 460-463) on the transition between Sefer Shemot and Sefer Vayikra.

Rav HaCohen begins with Parshat Pekudei, and specifically, with two verses from the end of Parshat Pekudei:

‘And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of the

Lord filled the Mishkan’ (Shemot 40:34-35).

Here we read that once the Mishkan is complete, and before any sacrifice has been offered up therein, that it is filled with God’s glory and covered with a cloud which then raises the Mishkan to such a high spiritual level that it becomes spiritually inaccessible to Moshe.

In contrast, Vayikra begins with the command:

‘And He called to Moshe, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying’ (Vayikra 1:1)

What this means is that, in contrast to what we read from Parshat Pekudei, Moshe is now able to access the Mishkan. But how is this so?

Basing himself on the Ramban (commentary to Vayikra 1:1) & the Likutei Torah (Vayikra 1), Rav HaCohen explains that when God called Moshe, He invested Moshe with a heightened level of spiritual energy on par with

what he'd previously received while on Mount Sinai which thereby enabled Moshe to enter the Mishkan.

According to this approach, the end of Sefer Shemot depicts the high spiritual level of the Mishkan, while the beginning of Sefer Vayikra describes the solution which enabled Moshe to enter the Mishkan – namely his spiritual ‘call-up’ and his spiritual upgrade from God. On this basis, the sacrifices described in Sefer Vayikra were meant to achieve greater spiritual closeness to God.

However, Rav HaCohen then offers a radically different approach of interpreting Sefer Vayikra where, once the Mishkan was built, its high spiritual level needed to be reduced in order to enable Moshe and others to enter and serve therein. This reflects the view of the Rambam that the sacrifices described in Sefer Vayikra were a concession to idolatrous tendencies.

According to the former, the transition from Sefer

Shemot to Sefer Vayikra involved a spiritual upgrade of Moshe to be worthy to enter the Mishkan. According to the latter, the transition from Sefer Shemot to Sefer Vayikra involved a spiritual downgrade of the Mishkan in order to enable Moshe to enter.

Perhaps we may wonder why either of these options were necessary, and why Moshe was not able to immediately enter the Mishkan once it was complete?

While various commentaries have attempted to answer this question, I believe that this comes to show us that sometimes we need to upgrade ourselves to reach where we wish to go, while sometimes God chooses to show Divine grace by performing an act of *tzimtzum* (divine contraction) to enable us to enter His abode.

Whatever the case, we should understand and appreciate that Divine communion is a treasured gift, requiring spiritual movement by us and by God.

Hooks and Connections

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

When the building of the Mishkan is completed, Moshe performs a final accounting of the funds collected and how they were used. Our parsha opens with a review of the numbers: how much gold was used, how much silver and how much copper. In the process of this review, the Torah notes a minor expense directed towards the fashioning of silver hooks, which would be used to hold up the tapestries making up the walls of the Mishkan (Shemot 38:28). At face value, this expenditure report doesn't seem to offer us much by way of spiritual teaching. After all, the hooks were merely a technical necessity, not a means for connecting the people to God. But the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 51:6) sees between the lines a crucial teaching moment for Moshe and the Jewish people. While each and every step of the Mishkan's construction was communicated to Moshe from God, as highlighted by the repeated reminder throughout our Parsha that all steps were undertaken “as God commanded Moshe,” the budget review was Moshe's independent undertaking. Concerned that some members of the Jewish people would fear he had skimmed a few silver talents off the top, Moshe made a point of not inaugurating the Mishkan until everyone was assured that no donations had been misdirected or mishandled. Along the way, though, Moshe realized that the numbers don't add up! Upon running the numbers, he discovered 1,775 Shekel that had not been accounted for – a minor

rounding error for all that was collected, but one that nonetheless he felt may cost him his reputation as the faithful leader of the Jewish people. It was in that moment that God directed Moshe's attention upwards, whereupon he noticed the silver hooks, hiding behind the tapestries they were holding up. That was where the rest of the silver had been used, and the matter was settled. The Jewish people celebrated the completion of the Mishkan joyously, confident that Moshe had been faithful in his oversight of the project. It is no accident that the component of the Mishkan that allowed for a successful accounting were the hooks, known in Hebrew as ‘vavim.’ The word ‘vav’ refers not only to hooks, which held together fabrics in the Tabernacle courtyard, but also to the root of the word, the letter ‘vav’. The literal meaning of ‘vav’ in Hebrew is ‘and’, signifying connection and partnership. To this day, many Sifrei Torah are written in accordance with a kabbalistic tradition called “vavei ha’amudim,” ‘the vavs/hooks of the pillars,’ such that every column of the Torah scroll begins with the letter Vav. But the origin of this tradition, cited by Rema as a custom (YD 273:6), is not entirely clear.

Perhaps as the Torah is to be our connection between the mundane and the ethereal, it seems fitting that each column of the Torah would begin with the letter Vav, representing this ideal. For without the mundane there is no need for the ethereal, and without the ethereal the mundane is purposeless. The ‘vavs,’ hanging atop the

Mishkan and atop the Torah scroll, hold up our entire weltanschauung. Torah is founded upon connection and trust between the realms of the spiritual and physical. We, as humans, are born on Yom Vav, the sixth day of creation. We have the ability and opportunity to serve as ‘vavim,’ as connectors and bridge builders. With strife emerging once again between sectors of the population of Israel, and paradoxically with growing opportunities to connect Jewish communities within and beyond the State of Israel around common cause, purpose and challenge, now is

the time for vavim – connections. We must live up to the mission of being born on Yom Vav, of Moshe’s meticulous leadership, building bridges through the development of mutual trust and partnership. Perhaps we will be worthy of making our national homeland, along with the entire world, into a Mishkan, a peaceful dwelling place for us and the Divine presence.

I wish to thank Rabbi Dr. Jacob J Schacter for sharing with me several years ago the kernel of the idea presented.

Haftarat Pekudei: The Bloody Hands of King David

Rabbi Elie Mischel (From *From Within the Tent: The Haftarat, Essays on the Weekly Haftarah from the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University*, YU Press, 2011)

Unlike any other king of Israel, David holds a unique place in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people, to this very day. He is the gold standard for a leader of Israel; a man who combined great righteousness with wisdom, courage, and self sacrifice. He slew Goliath, united the tribes of Israel, and established Jerusalem as the capital of the nascent Israelite state. It was only natural for David to personally lead the Israelite nation in the building of the Beit Ha-Mikdash, a house for the God of Israel, to whose service David had dedicated his life.

But alas, it was not to be. Not David but Shlomo, David’s young son, would be granted the privilege of building the Beit Ha-Mikdash. In the words of Shlomo:

Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said unto David my father: Whereas it was in thy heart to build a house for My name, thou didst well that it was in thy heart; nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for My name.

David’s yearning to build a house for God, much like Moshe’s great desire to enter the land of Israel, is silenced by the word of God. What is the reason for this apparent injustice? Why is David, among the greatest of men, refused the chance to build God’s Temple? Unlike God’s refusal to listen to Moshe’s pleas, which remains unexplained, we are given a reason why David cannot build the Temple. In Divrei Ha-Yamim, David himself reveals the reason behind God’s refusal:

And David said to Solomon: My son, as for me, it was in my heart to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Thou hast shed blood

abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name...

“*Dam la-rov shafakhta u-milchamot gedolot asita*” – “You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars.” As the great warrior of Israel, David slew tens of thousands among the enemies of Israel, bringing peace and security to the tribes of Israel that they had rarely experienced before. And for this ‘sin’ of defending the people of Israel and expanding the borders of the Holy Land, David is refused the right to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash? All of David’s battles were fought for the honor of, and at the word of God! This phrase, “*dam la-rov shafakhta*,” is practically begging for an explanation, prompting commentators throughout the generations to suggest fascinating explanations for this puzzling ‘sin’ of David.

Some Classic Responses

The Yalkut Shimoni, in counterintuitive fashion, explains that when David was told that he could not build the Beit Ha-Mikdash due to the blood that he had shed, he became frightened, and said: “I am not worthy of building the Beit Ha-Mikdash!” God replied soothingly to David: “Do not fear! Those [whom you killed in battle] ... are like sacrifices before me.” If so, why was David forbidden to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash? God continued and explained that if David would build the Beit Ha-Mikdash, it could never be destroyed; and if the Beit Ha-Mikdash were to be indestructible, there would be no physical object upon

which Hashem could pour out His wrath when the people of Israel sin. The people themselves would be forced to bear the brunt of God's anger.

The Yalkut's answer, though interesting, turns the simple reading of the verses in Divrei Ha-Yamim on their head. David was not unfit to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash; rather, he was too fit.

The Malbim offers a more straightforward approach, explaining that David was unworthy of building the Beit Ha-Mikdash due to shedding blood unnecessarily, by engaging in voluntary wars, "milchamot ha-reshut." Radak adds that although David did nothing wrong by killing his enemies, he was, ultimately, responsible for the deaths of thousands of gentiles, among whom were surely good people. A man who has killed innocent victims, no matter how unavoidable his actions were, is not fit to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash, the house of peace.

In contrast to Malbim and Radak, who focus on the actions of David, Rambam understands "*dam la-rov shafakhta*" as an inherent flaw in David's character. He writes, shockingly, that David was a "*ba'al achzariyut*" – a man of cruelty. While David's cruelty was wielded only against the enemies of Israel, nonetheless, a man with such a character flaw was not the appropriate choice to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash.

How can Rambam make such an assumption about the character of David, based solely on the phrase, "*dam la-rov shafakhta*"? While Rambam does not state so explicitly, he appears to base his presumption on the principle of "*acharei ha-peulot nimshakhin ha-levavot*" – "One's heart is drawn after one's actions." Our character traits are shaped, to a great degree, by our actions. No matter how kind he may naturally be, a man who spends years of his life immersed in battle and bloodshed will develop, at least to some degree, the trait of cruelty.

The powerful effect of war upon soldiers is described quite powerfully in *The Seventh Day: Soldiers' Talk about the Six-Day War*, in which Israeli veterans of the Six Day War describe the impact of the fighting on their psyche and character. One soldier related:

As we went on fighting, I began to care less. For the whole three days that we fought I was sick and vomiting, but it meant less and less to me. All my friends were going down and we grew madder and madder... As we grew angrier, we stopped being human beings. You start out shouting, but by this time, we were all just machines for killing. Everyone's face is set in a snarl and there's a deep growl coming from your belly. You want to kill and kill. You grow like an animal, you know – no,

worse than an animal.

One can argue that a soldier's intense emotions during the time of battle, however cruel they may be, do not necessarily have a long term impact on a soldier's character traits. However, Amnon, another veteran of the Six Day War, described his eye witness account of a car accident and the way in which his battlefield experiences affected his reaction to the accident:

A few days after the war, I was standing by the road... when suddenly a man was flung out of a car and just lay there on the roadside. Everyone nearby started running around in a panic, but I found myself standing there quite indifferent to it all. The first picture that flashed into my mind was of bodies like this lying on the roadside. I really saw it like that – and I just stood there... And he was one of us [a Jew]. So if that's what you mean by life becoming cheaper, then perhaps...

Clearly, the traumatic experiences of a soldier in war can leave a lasting impact. As such, Rambam's assessment of David's character, while harsh, at least has a leg to stand on.

Sacrificing Purity for the Sake of Righteousness

While insightful, the explanations offered by the classic commentaries are ultimately unsatisfying. Was David truly worthy of punishment for simply following God's command? And while the effects of war on the psyche of soldiers are real, Rambam's assessment of David as possessing the trait of cruelty is hard to accept, given his great love for the people of Israel, so evident in Sefer Tehillim. Is there another approach to be found, a more satisfying explanation of "*dam la-rov shafakhta*"?

In his analysis of Megillat Esther, Yoram Hazony presents a fundamental tension that exists in the life of every human being: the tension between the ideals of purity and righteousness. Every human being, explains Hazony, has a body that constantly urges man to occupy himself with its physical and emotional needs, such as eating, digestion, physical relations, honor and anger, depression, etc. It is possible, and perhaps likely for much of humanity, to live one's life entirely preoccupied with the satisfaction of these bodily and emotional needs, only to find that one "has nothing to show for his efforts other than having worn out a body which started its career fresh."

It is therefore considered a great virtue to minimize, as much as possible, one's focus on the body and emotions in order to enable the soul to concentrate on the higher aspects of life. This virtue, according to Hazony, is the classic Jewish ideal of kedushah, of purity. "Be Holy!" The struggle of Jews throughout history, to transcend their struggles for a livelihood and fears of gentile persecution in

the pursuit of Torah scholarship and meaningful prayer, is a struggle for kedushah, for the mastery and transcendence of the self.

Alongside the ideal of purity, we find a second, equally important value – that of tzedek, or righteousness. “Righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue.” Simply put, it is to help, heal and improve the world for the sake of other people. Whether we seek to improve the lives of our family, community, our nation or the world as a whole, the ideal of righteousness demands that we focus our energies and efforts outwards.

The tension between these two lofty ideals lies in their attitude towards power. The ideal of purity demands that man reject power, while the ideal of righteousness can only be accomplished through the accumulation of power. By definition, man’s success in realizing one ideal leads him away from the realization of the other:

For the saint, the man of perfect study and prayer, power is essentially exorcised as a motive, and so the entire world of spiritual blemishes – the obsession with honor and wealth, tantrums and rages, depressions, competitiveness, cruelty – all these are not found in him. But power is lost to him as a tool: He may give charity from what he has, but the good he can do is of necessity circumscribed; he may wish to do right in the world, but he has few resources and does not really know how. For the hero, the man of great deeds, the endless game of accumulating power and the preoccupation with wielding it... leaves him relatively little time for contemplation, for study and thought, for prayer. He may include such activities in his daily routine, but finds it difficult to concentrate as the world presses in on him, demanding that he return to it. The saint and hero may be religious men both. Yet the saint makes a token effort towards power and leaves the rest to God, while the hero leaves nothing to God until he himself reaches exhaustion.

With an understanding of this tension, Hazony explains that it is only natural that David, despite his greatness, was disqualified from building the Beit Ha-Mikdash. David was a man of righteousness, the king responsible for drastically improving the lives of the people of Israel by defeating their enemies in war. Yet his focus on righteousness, and on acquiring the power necessary to further his righteous efforts, came with a price: a sacrifice of personal purity. As a man of the world, David’s hands were of necessity bloodied: “*dam la-rov shafakhta*.” Consequently, God’s refusal to allow David to build the Beit Ha-Mikdash must be seen not as a sign of David’s unworthiness, but rather as an indicator of his greatness and accomplishments in the realm of tzedek. Shlomo, to whom the task of building the

Beit Ha-Mikdash falls, is not a greater leader than his father David. Rather, there is a division of labor amongst the great leaders of Israel; it was David’s role to defeat the enemies of Israel, while Shlomo was destined to be a man of peace. Shlomo, the man whose very name derives from “shalom” (peace), was destined to build the house of peace, the Beit Ha-Mikdash.

Equally enlightening is the contrast between David and his immediate predecessor – Shaul Ha-Melekh. Shaul, chosen by God as the first king of Israel, is one of the more fascinating figures of Tanakh. He was a unique man, a great leader of his generation. And yet, tragically, his reign fell apart, beginning with his inability to follow God’s command in the battle against the Amalekite nation. His misplaced mercy led to a strange and terrifying downfall, culminating in suicide just moments before he could be captured by the Pelishtim, the mortal enemies of the Jewish people.

The general perception of Shaul is one of failure; he is the great man, who for one reason or another, simply couldn’t make it as king, and is soon replaced by the great king David. However, R. Avraham ben Dov Ber, the reclusive son of the Maggid of Mezeritch, offers a very different perspective on Shaul, and in the process sheds light on the matter at hand:

There are two types of zaddikim. The first is the elevated zaddik who is unable to lead his generation; he is so spiritual that his generation cannot tolerate him. Saul was such a type: “from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people” (Shmuel I 9:2). This means that his power of comprehension was so profound that his generation could not tolerate him for he was in touch with the supernal wisdom and was unable to descend to his generation down beneath in order to raise them up. The truth is that Saul was not suited to be king and belonged in a different rank...

Shaul was not too small a man to be king; he was too holy to be king! He was so spiritual, so great, that he could not effectively lead the people of his generation. He lived in the ivory tower of Judaism, a man infused with holiness but unable to relate to the practical needs of his people.

R. Avraham continues, and in a passage strikingly in step with Rambam’s interpretation of David, explains that Shaul was too compassionate to be an effective leader: “He had the quality of compassion... and his sole intention was for the sake of heaven... But the truth is otherwise. For just as the quality of compassion is necessary, so is the quality of cruelty. Just as the Creator commanded us to have compassion when compassion is demanded, so did

He command us to be cruel when circumstances demand cruelty.”

Shaul’s excessive compassion, his overemphasis of the ideal of purity, rendered him an ineffective leader, and led ultimately to his tragic demise. The king’s role is not to immerse himself in deep spirituality, but rather to pursue righteousness for the sake of purity; to exercise power in order to create a haven of spirituality.

Rambam attributed the quality of *achzariyut* (cruelty) to David, as a character flaw. However, it is possible to reinterpret David’s “cruelty” in a positive fashion. It is precisely David’s “cruelty,” better described as his ability and willingness to dirty himself for the sake of others, which distinguished David from Shaul and made him the great leader that he was. David was the ultimate man of righteousness, and thus the ultimate king, and it is this greatness that prevented him from building the Beit Ha-Mikdash, the house of purity.

R. Adin Steinsaltz, in his interpretation of the Tanya, describes the complete *tzadik* as “one who abnegates not only the desires of his animal soul but also those of his Godly soul, because the only desire that drives him is the desire to serve God ... A true leader is one who is capable of the ultimate self sacrifice: the sacrifice of his very “I” ... of his soul’s yearning to cleave to God.”

“*Dam la-rov shafakhta*”: King David sacrificed his own personal spiritual greatness, his own purity, for the sake of righteousness, for God and the Jewish people. For this, the people of Israel are eternally grateful.