

Geulas Yisrael #141

Vayakhel: The Second Time Around

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The physical construction of the mishkan was executed by a select team of artisans, craftsmen, and engineers. Most of the general populace had little direct involvement with the building process. After donating the raw materials for the mishkan they stepped aside, allowing the professionals to complete the project.

It is surprising then, that the Torah describes the various dimensions and contours of the mishkan in such precise detail. These specs were only relevant to a handful of people tasked with the actual construction and manufacture process. It is odd that the Torah provides such meticulous details which were only relevant for a tiny percentage of the population.

It is even more peculiar that the Torah repeats this enormous list of details a second time, in Parshat Vayakhel. In general, the Torah economizes its words, and, in this instance, it could have easily crunched the entire construction story into a few sentences. The Torah could have summarized the entire parsha by writing "All the materials were collected and handed to the craftsmen who then fashioned the mishkan as Hashem had earlier instructed". Why does the Torah expound such complicated details a second time. Isn't one round enough?

The Bride and Groom and Their Furniture

A little over 20 years ago, my revered Rebbe U'Mori, Harav Aharon Lichtenstein delivered a legendary speech addressing this riddle. He spun an enchanting story to illustrate the reason for the Torah's verbosity.

He told the story of a groom and a bride visiting a store, a few days before their wedding, to select furnishings for their new home. They strolled leisurely through the store, patiently considering each furniture option. Their relaxed pace stemmed from the fact that, for them, selection of furniture wasn't just a logistical or practical issue. Each furnishing evoked their hopes and dreams for their future. As they chose dining room furniture, they imagined it decked out for Shabbat and surrounded by family. As they selected kitchen furnishings, they

dreamed of preparing food for guests. As they chose their bedroom furniture, they envisioned the many private moments they would spend together. Each decision and each selection was a labor of love. The furniture was ordered and stored, in anticipation of the wedding day.

Shockingly, the night before the wedding the bride betrayed her husband. The next day the appalling news broke, and the entire wedding disintegrated into anger and vitriol, as both families stormed out of the wedding hall in outrage. Realizing that his marriage was doomed, the groom contacted the furniture store to cancel the furniture order.

For months the two parties didn't speak. At some point though, a relative of the bride contacted the groom, pleading with him to consider a possible rapprochement. At first, he was horrified by the notion, but ultimately, he agreed, hesitatingly, to meet the woman who had so deeply insulted him. Though at first it was extremely awkward, ultimately, they agreed to reunite, and, after many meetings, the wedding was rescheduled.

A few days prior to the wedding the groom and bride returned to the furniture store to select new furniture. This time, however, every selection was cloaked with pain and anguish. Instead of the love and anticipation which had sparked their initial visit they were now haunted by suspicion and distrust. They had little appetite for leisurely selections but instead made hurried decisions, ordering whatever floor models were available. The selection of furniture was now emotionally burdensome and laborious. They had little desire for details.

Restoring Innocence

Human beings can forgive each other but can rarely remove the scars of past wounds. We can summon generosity of spirit and forgive those who injured us, but the pain rarely disappears. Even after forgiveness, the relationship is rarely the same. After it heals, it still hurts.

Hashem is different. He promises that, after forgiveness, we can return to our original state of innocence. The bold announcement of **חַדֵּשׁ יְמֵינוּ** **חַדֵּשׁ** invites us to return to our original state of purity, prior to our religious breakdown.

The betrayed husband forgave his wife, but their relationship would never be the same. He could not select furniture with the same enthusiasm he once felt. By contrast Hashem, our Husband, reboots our relationship "just as it was". His "excitement" about the mishkan and its furniture is just as enthusiastic as it was prior to the debacle of the egel. The lengthy repetition of mishkan details in Vayakhel emphasizes that Hashem forgave us as if the egel betrayal never occurred. The details "matter" to Him now, just as they did before.

The first of the 13 attributes of mercy or the *י"ג מידות הרחמים* is the phrase containing the *ה'* repeated twice- *ה' ה'*. According to the gemara in Rosh Hashanah (17b) the repetition of the exact same word indicates that Hashem has mercy for us both *before* and *after* our sins. Namely, teshuvah resets our relationship to the exact same pre-sin condition, with the exact same tone and tenor. The very same word which describes divine mercy *prior* to sin, depicts divine mercy *after* sin.

The repetition of details in Vayakhel is Hashem's way of signaling that He loves us as deeply as He did before our betrayal. The details of our home and the dimensions of our furniture are just as endearing to Him now as they were before. We returned to innocence.

Historical Reboot

What is true about our *religious* relationship with Hashem is also true about our *historical* relationship with Him. The midrash (Eichah Rabbah 5) cites two interpretations about the word *כקדם*, effectively presenting two different "earlier" stages in history which we yearn for. According to one interpretation we yearn to return to the condition of Adam Harishon prior to his sin. We seek to reset our relationship with Hashem to the original pristine state of Man prior to original sin. We seek a religious reboot.

However, the second version of the midrash claims that we seek a restoration of the days of Shlomo Hamelech. Namely we seek *historical* restoration not a *religious* reboot. We long for a return to Jewish sovereignty and to Jewish monarchy.

The End of The Innocence

On October 7th we lost our historical innocence. This dark day shattered so many previously held conceptions. This historical rupture altered the manner in which we processed our return to Israel. Before this tragedy, we viewed our return to our homeland with unbridled optimism. Prophecies were materializing before our eyes and the graph of Jewish history was surging upward. It seemed as if the tables of history had turned, as we witnessed the level of divine hashgacha which had been obscured for so many gloomy centuries of Jewish exile. We thought we had left the era of הסתר פנים behind, and were sauntering toward redemption. We felt a boy-like enthusiasm about our future under Hashem's redemptive care.

October 7th reminded us of just how far we still need to go. It shattered our conception of history. We are no longer as innocent and even naïve as we were beforehand. The massacre sobered us with a heavy dose of realism. In the immediate sense, the redemptive process doesn't appear to be as smooth as we had anticipated. Our pride at returning to Israel has been enveloped in heartache and sadness.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, can we reset our historical outlook to its original state? Can we feel the same rush of optimism, even though we suffered such a breakdown. Can we renew our enthusiasm to its October 6th condition? Can we blend optimism with realism? Hashem expects us to. He wants us to view this process of returning כקדם, just as we viewed it before. We are no longer naïve and no longer giddy. That doesn't mean we aren't faithful and optimistic.

שובה ה' רבבות אלפי ישראל

We pray for the safe return of hundreds of hostages, tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of thousands of displaced Jews to their homes.

חדש ימינו כקדם

We pray that Hashem quickly resets our condition in Israel. We hope that after the fall, we are able to reboot it in our imaginations as well.