



# Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

## THE FUNCTION OF THE MISHKAN

RABBI DOVID KIMCHE

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ADAM DENNIS ('21)

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SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

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ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

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AKIVA ROSENTHAL ('20)

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The book of Shmot ends with a repeat listing of the building of the Mishkan and the vessels to be used therein. What may seem at first mere repetition in fact has much to teach us. The Torah would

not have used up precious columns on redundant details.

One of the fascinating discussions which appears in the writings of many commentators is the central question: What, at the end of the day, was the function of the Mishkan? Every school child, if asked this question, will happily tell you that it essentially was a 'House for Hashem' -- and they would be right. But there are many layers here.

One of the most significant commentaries on the Torah to be published in the 20th century was the Meshech Chochma, authored by Rav Meir Simcha from Dvinsk. In a complex but essential essay he explains the following: he notes that in last week's parsha, Ki Tisa, the discussion of Shabbat follows the discussion of the Mishkan. Yet here, in Vayakhel, the order is reversed. Why is that?

He explains, following the opinion of the Sforno (Shmot 20:21), that prior to the sin of the golden calf, the Mishkan was not needed as a vehicle through which Hashem's presence was to be revealed to the Jews. They didn't need such a centralized organ -- Hashem's presence was accessible to each and every one of Bnei Yisrael without any help. With the sin of the golden calf, however, Bnei Yisrael demonstrated that they in fact needed a physical entity with which to focus their experience of Hashem's presence. As conceived prior to the sin of golden calf, the Mishkan's function was simply meant to give expression to the reality that Hashem's Presence was upon the Jewish People. But it was not needed to create/foster/engender the belief that Hashem's presence was felt

by the Jews. And so, Shabbat, which strengthens our belief in a Creator, could come second to the Mishkan. Since the Mishkan was only there to enhance our belief, in the same way that Shabbat does, there would at that time have been no conflict between the Mishkan and Shabbat. Hence, in Ki Tisa, prior to the sin, the Mishkan precedes Shabbat.

Not so after the sin. The Mishkan's function shifted dramatically. It was now needed as the central place for Hashem's presence to emanate to the Jewish People. Construction of the Mishkan was no longer an expression of Divine service, but rather a precondition for it. As such, the activities of the Mishkan -- the melachot -- could no longer be permitted on Shabbat. This is hinted to in our parsha, when, after the sin of the golden calf, Shabbat comes before Mishkan. It is now to take precedence.

To tie this all up: A basic question must be asked: if indeed the Mishkan was an atonement for the golden calf, why does the command to build it come before the episode of the golden calf? Surely this is out of place. Armed with our new understanding we can say that the Mishkan has two elements: first, actualization of the spiritual strivings of the Jewish People, which preceded the golden calf, and second, building a dwelling place for the Shechina, which followed the golden calf.

## TAKING INITIATIVE

ADAM DENNIS ('21)

In this week's parsha, Moshe relays Hashem's message to Bnei Yisrael about all the materials they could bring and the services they could offer to the building of the Mishkan. The pasuk states:

וַיִּבְאוּ כָּל-אִישׁ אֲנֶשְׁרָא לְבֹו וְכָל אֲנֶשְׁרָא נְדָבָה רִחוּו אֲתוּ הַבְּיָאוּ אֶת-תְּרוּמַת ה' לְמַלְאכַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּלְקַל-עֲבֹדָתוֹ וּלְבִגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ

“And everyone whose heart lifted them and everyone whose spirit moved him came bringing to the Lord his offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting and for all its service and for the sacral vestments” (35:21).

Who were these people who had their “hearts lift[ed]”? What does this phrase mean? The Ramban says that these were the people who made the different parts of the Mishkan.

Why does it say that their “hearts lifted them” when talking about the commandment to donate to the Mishkan and not later on with the list of people who donated? In addition, the Jews were just enslaved in Egypt and had no idea how to make the different parts of the Mishkan because they were never taught. How were they able to figure out what to do?

The answer is that they found it in their hearts to do it. They came to Moshe and said, “We will do whatever you need us to do.” Rav Yerucham Levovitz asks why these people were distinguished from the rest of the Jews. He answers that it is because they took initiative in building the Mishkan. Individuals who are successful in life are the ones who take initiative.

If someone thinks little, they will stay little. However, one who thinks big will become big. How do you become a person who takes initiative? The Ramban says that you have to believe in yourself and in what you are doing. Only then will you be able to take initiative. It is important for everyone to realize the strengths and abilities that Hashem has given us and use them to do the right thing.

## EQUAL STATUS

SHOSHANA STADLAN ('22)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayakhel, the Torah continues describing the construction of the Mishkan. It goes into detail about the measurements, the materials, and even the order of construction. This parsha also mentions the appointment of the leaders of the construction of the portable House of God: Betzalel and Aholiav. Many other people who had the capability and desire to help build the Mishkan worked together. Out of all of the workers, only these two men are mentioned. Who are these two men and what warranted their incredible positions?

Betzalel descends from one of the most prominent tribes, Yehuda, and his great-grandmother was one of the greatest women, Miriam. His grandfather, Chur, like Miriam, stood up for righteousness and Hashem. The midrash relays that at Har Sinai, when Bnei Yisrael made the golden calves, Chur was killed trying to stop them. Hashem rewarded him by singling out his grandson, Betzalel, in the Torah.

On top of his prestigious heritage, Betzalel in his own right was a brilliant architect with divine wisdom. The Talmud describes an episode where Hashem instructed Moshe how to build the golden Menorah. Moshe was told to hammer a solid block of gold, but found the instructions difficult. When he came down from the mountain, he forgot the details of the explanation. In fact, Moshe went up two more times and still could not comprehend what Hashem instructed him. Finally, Hashem told Moshe to go to Betzalel and, immediately, Betzalel was able to complete the task. Moshe was bewildered and said, "You must have been standing under the shadow of God, Betzal-El, when he showed me how to make the Menorah." Betzalel was made the chief architect and was therefore mentioned out of all of the other skilled architects.

While Betzalel comes from a distinguished family, Aholiav does not. He comes from Dan, a lesser tribe and the son of Yaakov's concubines. Not much is known about Aholiav, but the little which is disclosed is the fact that Hashem put him on par with Betzalel, a brilliant artisan and part of the greatest tribe.

Rashi writes that Hashem was fulfilling,

וְלֹא נִכְרַשׁוּעַ לְפָנֵי־אֱלֹהִים כִּי־מַעֲשֵׂה יְדָיו כָּלָם

"A prince was not recognized before a poor man, for they are all the work of His hands" (Iyov 34:19). No matter what tribe, family, or wealth status one comes from, all are beloved by Hashem. By appointing Aholiav along with Betzalel, the Jewish people would understand that even if they are not a part of the most highly-regarded tribe or possess a large amount of money, they still have the ability to donate towards the Mishkan. He was showing Bnei Yisrael that any contribution, even from someone unable to make a large one, is as appreciated and meaningful as one from a rich person. This lesson can be applied to our everyday lives, to remember in our avodat Hashem that, no matter one's social or financial status, each person's fulfillment of mitzvot is meaningful in the eyes of Hashem.

## ELEVATING THE PHYSICAL

ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

Parshat Vayakhel discuss the multitude of donations Bnei Yisrael contribute towards the construction of

the Mishkan. The parsha mentions that Bnei Yisrael bring gifts of silver, gold, and different fabrics. All these gifts make total sense--of course Bnei Yisrael want to donate all their wealth towards creation of the Mishkan, the house of Hashem. However, when reading through the parsha, there is one very seemingly confusing pasuk.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת הַכִּיּוֹר נְחֹשֶׁת וְאֶת, כְּנוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת--בְּמִרְאֵת הַצְּבָאוֹת  
אֲשֶׁר צָבְאוּ פֶתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד

"And he made the laver of copper and its stand of copper, from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (38:8).

Why would the Kiyor be made out of mirrors? Doesn't Judaism value internal spiritual connection over the exterior appearance? Rashi answers this question by quoting a very famous midrash that starts by relaying a dialogue between Hashem and Moshe. Moshe initially did not want to accept the mirrors from the women. He thought that the Mishkan should not be tainted by the mirrors, which reflect vanity and self indulgence. However, Hashem disagreed with Moshe, telling Moshe that these mirrors were the most precious gift because through these mirrors, the women ensured the future generations of Bnei Yisrael.

The midrash continues by explaining that Pharaoh had decreed that Jewish men could not sleep in their houses so that they wouldn't sleep with their wives. Rabbi Shimon bar Chalafta explains that the Jewish women went to the Nile and Hashem made a miracle that the fish would swim into their jugs. The women would then sell their fish and buy wine and food; they brought the wine and food to their husbands who were working in the fields. Their husbands were exhausted after long days of slave labor and had no interest in having sexual relations. After the couples had eaten and drunk, the women would take out their mirrors and joke around with their husbands, saying, "I am more attractive than you," to which their husbands would respond, "I am more attractive than you." Through these mirrors, the Jewish women were able to fight their husbands' exhaustion and bring back their desire to have children, proven through the pasuk "תַּחַת הַתְּפוּחַ עוֹרְרָת"--"I awakened your love under the apple-tree" (Shir HaShirim 10:8) in reference to the fields where the men worked. Even through the most difficult times of slavery, these women were able to conjure love, allowing for Bnei Yisrael and Judaism to continue to exist.

These mirrors were used for the Kiyor, the washing basin, which the Kohanim would use to purify themselves. The Kiyor was used to get the Kohanim ready and holy enough for avodat Hashem. In essence, the women's mirrors strengthened the connection between Hashem and the Kohanim.

Mirrors, just like everything in life, are not inherently bad or good. Any physical object can be used selfishly, but physical objects also have the power to become holy through using them to serve Hashem. These women were able to take their physical mirrors and make them holy by using them to ensure the existence of the Jewish people and then using them in Mishkan. May we all emulate these women and have ability to elevate the physicality in our lives.

## CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY

AKIVA ROSENTHAL ('20)

Last week's parsha told of the sin of the golden calf, interrupting the explanation of how to build the Mishkan and the description of the Jews actually building it. This week's parsha begins with the word, "וַיִּקְהַל", Hashem's command to Moshe to unite the people. Moshe bring the Jews together by starting the construction of the Mishkan. Additionally, he informs the nation of the laws of Shabbat. What's the connection between these two tasks?

Rabbi Sacks answers that the Mishkan, a home for Hashem, and Shabbat accomplish the same goal of unifying the people by forcing them to act in a selfless manner. Both mitzvot revolve around praising Hashem, which puts all Jews on the same level because of the communal obligation to serve Hashem. Additionally, both mitzvot require groups of people working together. Davening is supposed to be done with ten men and the Mishkan can't be built by just one person. In fact, when Moshe asked for the people to bring everything they could, in order to beautify the mishkan each tribe brought more than enough materials, proving that a large goal unifies a community.

The punishment of the golden calf included the immediate death of thousands of Jews, so the only way to combat that great loss was to come together to share in their suffering. The Jews learned a lesson that is taught in Gemara Ta'anit: an individual's prayer requires kavanah, but a communal prayer is accepted without kavanah. Just like nobody can build the Mishkan alone, so too, nobody can go through a horrible tragedy alone. May we all contribute as much as we can to our schools, shuls, and Jewish communities in order to benefit from the greatest returns.

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