**S.A.LT. – PARASHAT VAYAKHEL – PEKUDEI**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

We read in Parashat Pekudei of the completion of the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah relates that when the artisans assigned the task of making the *Mishkan* and its furnishings brought their completed work to Moshe, he blessed them (39:43). Rashi, citing *Torat Kohanim*, explains that Moshe wished them, “*Yehi ratzon she-tishreh Shekhina be-ma’aseh yedeikhem*” – “May it be His will that the Divine Presence shall rest in your handiwork.” The simple meaning of this wish, seemingly, is that as the purpose of the *Mishkan* was for God to “reside” among the nation (25:8, 29:45), Moshe wished the artisans that their efforts would be successful in achieving this lofty goal.

An additional reading of this blessing was offered by Rav Gedalya Aharon Rabinowitz of Linitz, in his *Chein Aharon*. He notes the Gemara’s famous discussion in Masekhet Yoma (86a) about the especially grievous prohibition of *chilul Hashem* (defamation of God), where the Gemara gives several examples of otherwise legitimate practices which violate this prohibition when they are performed by a distinguished religious figure. For example, under certain circumstances, purchasing on credit could create a *chilul Hashem* if the customer is a Torah scholar, as he could appear as trying to avoid paying. The Gemara here makes the point that those who represent the Torah’s values and lifestyles to the masses must exercise special care to avoid suspicion, not to even innocently appear as acting or speaking inappropriately, in a way that would cause people to ridicule or disdain the Torah or *Am Yisrael*. They must conduct all their affairs on an especially high moral and ethical standard in order to bring the Torah honor and dignity, and not, Heaven forbid, the opposite.

On this basis, the Rebbe of Linitz suggested explaining Moshe’s blessing to the people after the completion of the *Mishkan*. This occasion marked a new stage in the nation’s development, as they had raised themselves to the level where the Divine Presence would take residence among them. And so now, even more than previously, they needed to conduct all their affairs in an especially dignified and respectable manner. Moshe therefore blessed them that the Divine Presence should “rest in your handiwork” – that they all their conduct should be worthy of the Divine Presence. Particularly now, after completing the *Mishkan*, as God is taking residence, as it were, among them, Moshe urged them to raise the level of all their conduct. Having risen to an especially lofty spiritual level, it was now vitally important for them to act with integrity and nobility, in a manner befitting the one nation among whom God chose to reside.

Sunday

Parashat Vayakhel tells of the construction of the *Mishkan*, in fulfillment of the detailed commands which God had presented to Moshe, as we read in Parashat Teruma. Already the Gemara in Masekhet Berakhot (55a) noted the discrepancy between the commands in Parashat Teruma and their fulfillment in Parashat Vayakhel, with respect to the sequence of construction. In issuing the commands regarding the *Mishkan*, God first commanded constructing the furnishings kept inside the *Mishkan*, and then the structure itself. (The notable exception is the incense altar, which, surprisingly, is presented at the very end of Parashat Tetzaveh, after the commands regarding the *Mishkan* and the priestly garments.) In Parashat Vayakhel, however, the Torah tells of the artisans first building the structure, and then proceeds to tell of their constructing the furnishings kept inside the *Mishkan*.

The Gemara, cited by Rashi in the beginning of Parashat Pekudei (38:22), relates that when Moshe first summoned Betzalel, the chief artisan assigned over the project, and communicated to him God’s commands, he mentioned the furnishings before the structure. Betzalel then noted to Moshe that this sequence could not be accurate, because it is far more reasonable to first build a structure so that there will be somewhere to place the furnishings once they are constructed. Moshe replied, “Perhaps you were in the shadow of the Almighty [*be-tzel Kel*]” – because indeed, this was God’s intention, that the *Mishkan* be built before the furnishings. Although God told Moshe first about the construction of the furnishings, this was because He wanted to mention first the most sacred items. But as a practical matter, He wanted the structure to be built first, as otherwise, the furnishings would have nowhere to be stored in the interim. Moshe was dazzled by Betzalel’s intuition, his recognizing that God wanted the *Mishkan* to be built before its furnishings.

Rav Yitzchak Zelig Morgenstern of Sokolov (a great-grandson of the Kotzker Rebbe), in his *She’eirit Yitzchak*, suggests a possible explanation of this exchange between Moshe and Betzalel. He writes that the question as to the sequence of the *Mishkan*’s construction revolved around the concern of the sacred articles being defiled by the people if they were left out in the open during the interim, before the structure was built. Moshe initially figured that the sacred articles should be constructed first, as befitting their unique status, and he assumed that the people could be trusted not to touch them while they were left exposed as the *Mishkan* itself was being built. Betzalel, however, noted that this cannot be done, because the people could not be trusted. Moshe acknowledged that he had erred, and that indeed, God wanted the structure to be built first, before the furnishings.

According to this reading, the Gemara here teaches the importance of building our “*Mishkan*” with an understanding of the people whom it is meant to serve. We must build religious life in strict accordance with halakhic requirements – just as *Benei Yisrael* built the *Mishkan* in strict accordance with God’s commands – but also in a manner that best suits the people in every particular time and place. Moshe praised Betzalel for his understanding of the people, for his intuitive sense of which sequence would be suitable and which would not be suitable given *Benei Yisrael*’s condition at that time. Whenever we involve ourselves in building the “*Mishkan*,” in building institutions and spreading Torah knowledge, we must try to do so with this kind of intuitive understanding of the people, so that our “*Mishkan*” will be effective and successful in fulfilling the goal of bringing God’s presence to the Jewish Nation.

Monday

Parashat Vayakhel begins by telling of Moshe assembling *Benei Yisrael* for the purpose of conveying to them God’s instructions to build the *Mishkan*, which he introduces with the command to observe Shabbat. Rashi, commenting on the first word of the *parasha* – “*va-yakhel*” (“[Moshe] assembled”) – explains that this word means “not that one gathers people with his hands, but rather that they are gathered by his word.” It appears that Rashi here distinguishes between the verb *a.s.f.*, which denotes the physical act of collecting, and the verb *k.h.l.*, which is used in the *hif’il* form (implying causing others to perform an action), and thus denotes instructing people to assemble. Whereas *a.s.f.* means to assemble directly, *k.h.l.* means to cause people to assemble.

At first glance, it appears that Rashi here simply clarifies the different meanings of these two verbs, explaining why the Torah uses here the term “*va-yakhel*” instead of “*va-ye’esof*.” Since the latter is used only in reference to the physical act of gathering, the Torah employs here the former, which means “cause to assemble,” and not the act of assembling.

[Rav Moshe Taragin](https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/919283/rabbi-moshe-taragin/10-minute-rashi-vayakhel-miriam-s-reward-creative-creatures-decentralizing-moshe-rabenu/) suggested an additional reading of Rashi’s comments. When Rashi emphasizes that “*va-yakhel*” does not refer to gathering people “with one’s hands,” he does not necessarily mean that Moshe did not assemble *Benei Yisrael* “with his hands,” which is plainly obvious. Rather, he perhaps means that Moshe did not assemble the people simply by force of his authority. He did not command or instruct the people to assemble, but rather facilitated the assembly by informing the people that he wished to address them. The people gathered “by his word” not in the sense of obedience to his authority, but through his encouragement, influence and guidance.

The significance of this point lies in the fact that this assembly took place following the sin of the golden calf. Whether God’s command that *Benei Yisrael* build the *Mishkan* came in response to the sin of the golden calf, or was issued before the golden calf (a matter that is subject to debate), it is clear that the assembly in which Moshe instructed the people to build a *Mishkan* occurred after the golden calf. *Benei Yisrael* created and worshipped a golden calf in reaction to Moshe’s extended stay atop Mount Sinai, which led them to mistakenly conclude that he would not be returning (“…for this man, Moshe, who took us from the land of Egypt, we do not know what happened to him” – 32:1). Thus, the sin of the golden calf was the result of the people’s overdependence on Moshe. The moment it appeared that he was gone, they rejected all that he had taught them, and resorted to pagan worship. The people’s commitment to God was fully dependent on Moshe, to the point where the prospect of his death led them to completely reverse their course. Part of the process of rectifying this mistake, therefore, was breaking this dependence, decentralizing Moshe’s role in the people’s commitment to God. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Rashi emphasizes that Moshe did assemble the people “with his hands” – by force, through the power of his authority, but rather through his guidance and influence. In the wake of the tragedy of the golden calf, it became necessary to diminish, however slightly, Moshe’s leadership role, to make it clear to the people that they needed to act and perform out of their own volition and independent decision, and not merely respond robotically to Moshe’s instruction.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Vayakhel of *Benei Yisrael*’s enthusiastic response to Moshe’s call for donations of materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*. The people donated so generously that the artisans assigned to perform the work informed Moshe they received more than was necessary. Moshe then announced, “No man or woman shall do more work for the donation towards the sanctuary,” whereupon the people stopped bringing materials (36:6).

A number of commentators raised the question of why Moshe announced that the people should not “do more work,” instead of announcing that they should not bring materials. After all, the problem was not that too much “work” was being done, but rather that too many materials were being donated. What, then, did Moshe mean when he asked the people to stop performing “work” (“*melakha*”)?

The Gemara in Masekhet Shabbat (96b), as understood by Rabbeinu Chananel (cited by Tosafot, *s.v. u-mi-mai*), infers from this verse that bringing something from one place to another falls under the category of “*melakha*.” Meaning, Moshe indeed asked the people not to bring any more materials, and the word “*melakha*” in this verse refers to this activity, demonstrating that even transporting an object has the status of “work.” According to Rabbeinu Chananel, this verse is the source for the inclusion of *hotza’a* – carrying an object from one domain to another – among the activities that are defined as “*melakha*” and hence forbidden on Shabbat.

A number of commentators, however, explain this verse differently. Malbim writes that Moshe did not, in fact, ask the people to stop donating materials. He welcomed the excess materials which could be stored in a special treasury for use in the *Mishkan* as needed in the future. His request was only that the people stop producing the specific items that were needed. For example, the Torah earlier (35:25-26) mentioned that women produced sheets of wool for the *Mishkan*, and, the Malbim adds, we can imagine that people produced small metal items such as rings and hooks that were needed in the *Mishkan*. In light of the artisans’ report of an overabundance of materials, Moshe asked the people to stop producing these items, but he did not request that they stop bringing raw materials, which could be stored and used at some later point. However, the verse concludes, “*Va-yikalei ha-am mei-havi*” – “The people desisted from bringing,” stating explicitly that all donations were discontinued. Malbim explains that although Moshe requested only that the production of certain utensils be discontinued, the people realized that no more donations were needed, and so they stopped donating.

The Ramban takes a much different approach to this verse. He suggests that Moshe formulated his instruction in such a way that it applied to both those who produced items to be used in building the *Mishkan*, and those who brought raw materials. Moshe addressed both the men and the women – “No man nor woman shall do more work…” – and he thus spoke both of the wool produced by the women (as mentioned earlier), and the materials supplied by the men. And the term “*melakha*,” the Ramban suggests, can mean not only “work,” but also “possessions.” Thus, for example in Parashat Mishpatim (22:7), in discussing the case of a guardian who tampers with the property entrusted to him, the Torah speaks of “***melekhet*** *re’eihu*” – “his fellow’s property.” The Ramban further notes Yaakov’s response to Eisav’s offer that they travel together, in which he tells Eisav to travel ahead and that he will travel at a pace appropriate for “*ha-****melakha*** *asher lefanai*” – the large amount of possessions he had with him (Bereishit 33:14). Likewise, as the Ramban cites, Sefer Shemuel I (15:9) speaks of the property of Amalek seized by *Benei Yisrael* with the term “*melakha*.” The Ramban thus suggests that Moshe included in his announcement – that “*melakha*” be discontinued –both meanings of this word: the work performed by the women to produce sheets of wool, and the men’s donations of raw materials. These are both indicated by the word “*melakha*,” and Moshe thus announced that no more materials at all should be brought – neither those which were produced, nor those which would be brought.

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the announced made by Moshe to *Benei Yisrael* after it was reported that they were donating too many materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*:

“No man or woman shall do more work for the donation towards the sanctuary” (36:6). The Torah then tells that the people stopped bringing materials. It seems that Moshe instructed the people to stop bringing donations for the *Mishkan*, but instead of saying that nobody should bring materials, he said that nobody should “perform more work.” As we saw, different interpretations have been offered to explain this verse.

Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta (cited in *Siftei Tzadikim*) creatively suggests that Moshe’s announcement was in fact directed towards the artisans who had begun building the *Mishkan* and its furnishings. He instructed them to temporarily discontinue their work, because the sound and commotion produced by the flurry of activity generated a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm among the people, igniting a passionate desire to continue bringing donations. The way Moshe chose to solve the problem of excess materials, the Rebbe of Apta explained, was by suspending the work on the *Mishkan*, so that the people’s excitement would subside and they would thus stop bringing the materials…

The Rebbe of Apta here powerfully depicts the way our actions impact our surroundings, the ability we have to inspire and motivate the people around us. This illustration, of excitement generated by the sound of the craftsmen’s tools as they worked to build the *Mishkan*, models the way we can generate enthusiasm through our own enthusiasm and hard work. When we passionately and lovingly devote ourselves to a certain undertaking, we create a certain aura of energy and excitement that will, to one degree or another, affect others.

The Rebbe of Apta gave the example of a certain unlearned *shamash* (synagogue attendant) in Apta, whose job included waking the townspeople for prayers in the early hours. This *shamash* was exceedingly successful in this role, the Rebbe said, to the point where once somebody heard his knocking, he could no longer remain in bed. The Rebbe attributed this effect to the *shamash*’s special excitement and fervor, which had a profound impact upon others. When we devote ourselves with passion and fervor to a lofty goal, we ignite – at least to some extent – passion and fervor within the people around us, and can have a far greater impact upon our surroundings than we would have thought we could.

Thursday

The Torah tells in Parashat Vayakhel that *Benei Yisrael* donated more materials for the *Mishkan* than were needed, prompting Moshe to make an announcement that no more donations should be brought. At that point, the Torah relates, “*Va-yikalei ha-am mei-havi*” – the people stopped bringing materials (36:6).

*Ba’al Ha-turim* observes that the word “*va-yikalei*” appears in only one other instance in the Torah – in the story of the flood, where we read that when the time came for God to end the flood, “***va-yikalei*** *ha-geshem min ha-shamayim*” – “the rain from the heavens was stopped” (Bereishit 8:2). Seeking a connection between these two contexts, *Ba’al Ha-turim* notes the famous Midrashic tradition (*Yalkut Shimoni*, 411) that the precious stones needed for the *kohein gadol*’s garments were provided miraculously by God, together with the manna. During the period when materials were collected, when the manna fell from the heavens in the morning, it was accompanied with these jewels. And thus the same word used in reference to the cessation of rainfall after the flood is used also in reference to *Benei Yisrael*’s stopping their donations, as the stones stopped falling from sky just as the rainwaters in Noach’s time stopped falling from the sky.

We might suggest a different explanation for the connection between these two instances of the word “*va-yikalei*.” In both contexts, something which is, generally, beneficial and valuable needed to be discontinued. Rainwater brings the world great blessing, but in excess can be destructive, as in the time of the flood, and so God stops the rain, for the world’s benefit. Likewise, generous donations for a worthwhile project such as the *Mishkan* are to be encouraged and welcomed – but even this precious act can be inappropriate when done under the wrong circumstances. By using the word “*va-yikalei*” in regard to the discontinuation of donations for the *Mishkan*, just as it had in reference to the end of the flood, the Torah perhaps seeks to draw a comparison between noble *mitzva* acts and rain. Every *mitzva* act is precious – unless it is done at the wrong time, in which case it becomes “destructive” like excessive rainfall. Just as the vital blessing of rain can be damaging, so can intrinsically valuable actions be detrimental if they are performed under the wrong circumstances.

Interestingly, the root of the word “*va-yikalei*” – *k.l.a.* – appears also in Sefer Bamidbar (11:28), in reference to another instance where something inherently valuable was deemed inappropriate under the circumstances. God had commanded Moshe to select seventy elders who would serve as leaders underneath him, and to have them assemble with him outside the camp, where they would receive prophecy. Two of the chosen elders – Eldad and Meidad – chose to remain inside the camp, but nevertheless began speaking prophecy. When word got to Yehoshua, Moshe’s disciple, that Eldad and Meidad were prophesying, Yehoshua proclaimed, “*Kela’eim*” – urging Moshe to “restrain” them. Prophecy, of course, is something valuable, but in Yehoshua’s mind, Eldad and Meidad prophesied under the wrong circumstances, and so he demanded that they be restrained. Once again, the root *k.l.a.* is used in reference to something which is generally noble, but sometimes, when the circumstances dictate, needs to be “restrained” and discontinued.

Friday

Parashat Pekudei begins with the precise accounting made by Moshe of the precious metals that were used in the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah gives the specific amounts of gold, silver and copper that were donated, and tells how it was all used. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 51:6) famously explains that Moshe found it necessary to make this accounting because some members of *Benei Yisrael* suspected him of embezzling some of the precious materials for himself.

Interestingly, Rav Yehonatan Eibshutz, in his *Ahavat Yehonatan* (Shabbat Shekalim), offers a different explanation for the need for an accounting, asserting, “Israel, the sacred nation, certainly would not think that Moshe took any of the money.” Rav Yehonatan Eibshutz found it inconceivable that the people would have made such serious allegations against Moshe. He therefore advances a different theory, suggesting that some among the nation had misgivings about Moshe’s having warmly welcomed and accepted donations from everyone, including from sinners. People wondered if perhaps Moshe accepted materials from these donors in order not to embarrass them, but did not actually incorporate their contributions into the *Mishkan*. After all, they figured, as the *Mishkan* would be a sacred site, where the Divine Presence would reside, it needed to be made only from materials donated by the righteous members of the nation. The people therefore demanded an accounting of the donations – to see if the contributions of the less pious were in fact included in the *Mishkan*. Moshe presented his accounting which showed that every bit of precious metal donated towards the *Mishkan* was used, and nothing was left out.

According to Rav Yehonatan Eibshutz, then, the people were guilty not of wrongfully suspecting Moshe of theft, but of snobbery. They looked with disdain upon those whose level of religious commitment was lower than theirs, to the point where they did not want them included in the project of the *Mishkan*’s construction. Moshe therefore made an accounting to show that he included everybody’s donation – including the donations made by the less religiously observant. Every “*nediv leiv*” (35:22) – every person who was truly and genuinely moved to participate in this project of building a residence for the *Shekhina* in their midst, was invited to take part. Contributions to the spiritual fabric of *Am Yisrael* are to be welcomed from everyone who is sincerely driven, anyone who wishes to draw closer to God, regardless of their current spiritual standing. These contributions must not be restricted to the elite, and should instead be encouraged by everyone who is sincere in his or her commitment to help raise the standards of *kedusha* among the nation.

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