**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT PEKUDEI**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Pekudei tells that after the artisans assigned to construct the *Mishkan* and its various furnishings completed their work, they brought all the finished products to Moshe (39:33). Rashi, based on the *Midrash Tanchuma* explains:

They were unable to erect it. Since Moshe had performed no work for the *Mishkan*, the Almighty left it to him to erect it, as no person could erect it due to the weight of the planks, which a person does not have the strength to lift upright, but Moshe had them stand. Moshe said to the Almighty, “How is it possible for a human being to erect it?” He said to him, “You work with your hands.” He appeared as though he erected it, but it actually was lifted upright and stood on its own.

According to the Midrash, the artisans who prepared the *Mishkan* were unable to assemble it, due to the weight of the planks which needed to stand upright, and so they brought everything to Moshe, without erecting the structure. Moshe then turned to the Almighty and asked how it would be humanly possible to have the *Mishkan* stand, and God instructed him to try – whereupon the *Mishkan* stood up miraculously.

The obvious question arises as to why specifically Moshe was chosen for his task, if even he required God’s miraculous assistance. Once a miracle was needed to erect the *Mishkan*, why was it Moshe who was commanded, “You work with your hands” and give the impression of erecting the *Mishkan*? Why could this not be done by the artisans, who built all the various components of the *Mishkan*?

[Rav Aharon Lichtenstein *zt”l*](https://www.etzion.org.il/he/%D7%94%D7%A7%D7%9E%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%9B%D7%9F-%D7%A2%D7%9C-%D7%99%D7%93%D7%99-%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%94-0)explained that Moshe was chosen, quite simply, because he was the only one who truly invested the effort to become worthy of God’s miraculous assistance. Symbolically, Rav Lichtenstein noted, the assembly of the *Mishkan* represented the mastery of the full range of religious qualities that the Torah demands. The artisans all excelled in their respective fields, but nobody was capable of putting together the entire structure of the *Mishkan* – representing the all-too-common phenomenon of people mastering particular areas of Torah life, but who fail to erect the “*Mishkan*” in its totality, to cover the entire spectrum of ideals and responsibilities incorporated within the Torah. And, in truth, this seems all but impossible. The “*Mishkan*” of Torah life includes vast amounts of material to study, as well as strict compliance with halakhic minutiae, and responsibilities to one’s family, community and nation as a whole. Which human being, Moshe wondered, could possibly “erect” the *Mishkan*, given the overbearing weight of its numerous obligations? God responded, “*Asok ata be-yadekha*” – “You work with your hands.” Meaning, this seemingly impossible task is fulfilled by the one who truly wants to fulfill it and who invests maximum effort toward this goal. God emphasized that the *Mishkan* would be erected by “you” – Moshe Rabbeinu, the individual who, more than anybody else, genuinely strove for perfection, for excellence in all areas of religious life. Only when we put in maximum effort are we then worthy of being assisted in our lifelong quest to erect the complete “*Mishkan*.”

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Pekudei concludes its detailed account of the construction of the *Mishkan* by writing, “All the work for the Sanctuary…was completed; the Israelites did in accordance with everything the Lord had commanded Moshe…” (39:32). The simple meaning of this verse is that it makes what is essentially just a single statement – that *Benei Yisrael* completed the project of the *Mishkan*’s construction in precise accordance with God’s commands.

Rav Shlomo Kluger, however, in *Imrei Shefer*, creatively suggests a different interpretation, whereby the verse tells of two different things that happened sequentially. First, *Benei Yisrael* built the *Mishkan* precisely the way they were commanded to, meticulously following God’s instructions. And then, thereafter, they “did in accordance with everything the Lord commanded Moshe” – meaning, they followed all of God’s commands, including those that have nothing to do with the *Mishkan*. In other words, even after building the *Mishkan*, the people continued faithfully obeying and fulfilling God’s commands just as they previously. One might have suspected that after completing such a grand, lofty project, *Benei Yisrael* would have felt content and fallen into complacency, figuring they could now allow themselves a degree of laxity in their observance of God’s laws. The Torah therefore emphasized that even after they completed the construction of the *Mishkan*, *Benei Yisrael* maintained their commitment, recognizing that achievement must lead to great achievement, and does not give them license to relax their standards.

Monday

The *Midrash Ha-gadol* (to Shemot 38:22-23) notes that the artisans chosen to lead the construction of the *Mishkan* – Betzalel and Oholiav – belonged to the tribes of Yehuda and Dan, which are the two tribes which are compared to a lion. Yaakov, in his deathbed prophecies to his sons, proclaims, “*Gur aryeh Yehuda*” – that Yehuda would resemble a lion cub (Bereishit 49:9). And Moshe, before his death, uses the same expression – “*gur aryeh*” – in describing the tribe of Dan (Devarim 33:22). The *Midrash Ha-gadol* thus explains that members of specifically these two tribes were chosen to build the *Mishkan*, because the *Beit Ha-mikdash* (the permanent version of the *Mishkan*) is referred to as a lion (“*Hoi ariel ariel*” – Yeshayahu 29:1), and God Himself, for whom the *Mishkan* is built, is also likened to a lion (“*aryeh sha’ag mi lo yiyra*” – Amos 3:8).

What might be the significance of the description of Yehuda and Dan as a “lion” in relation to the *Mishkan*?

In Yaakov’s prophecy about Yehuda, he compares Yehuda to a lion who lies on the ground safely and securely, as no creature would dare try to threaten it even while it sleeps (“*kara ravatz ke-aryeh u-kh’lavi mi yekimenu*”). The lion’s outstanding strength protects it even as it sleeps, as other creatures know that it can immediately jump up off the ground and pounce with full force in but an instant. The *Sefat Emet*, citing his grandfather, the *Chiddushei Ha-Rim*, explains that this image refers to the quality of remaining strong even in periods of “lowliness” and failure. What made Yehuda strong, the *Chiddushei Ha-Rim* taught, was that even when he fell, he retained his composure and his confidence, and thus had the ability to immediately pick himself up – like a lion jumping from its sleep to pounce on its foe.

On this basis, the Tolna Rebbe suggested explaining the Midrash’s association between the “lion” quality of Yehuda and Dan, and the construction of the *Mishkan*. Already when the very first Sanctuary was constructed, it was established that it can be reconstructed when necessary. *Benei Yisrael* were shown that the lofty goal of having a Sanctuary in their midst would require the strength and courage to pick themselves up from the ground, to rebuild and recover with confidence and resilience. In the future, they would fail and lose their *Mikdash*, but they would then be able to work towards its restoration. This ability reflected the special “lion” quality with which our nation is endowed, and with which the very first *Mishkan* was constructed.

The Rebbe added that for this reason, the *Shulchan Arukh* begins with the admonition, “*Yitgabeir* ***ka-ari*** *la-amod ba-baoker la-avodat bor’o*” – that we must arise in the morning “like a lion,” energized and enthusiastic over our opportunity to serve God yet another day. We are to awaken in the morning recognizing that no matter what happened the previous day, no matter what mistakes we might have made, and no matter what condition we might find ourselves in, we have the capacity to overcome it all and move forward. We are to rise each morning recognizing that we have the strength of a lion, that even in times of struggle and even when we find ourselves “crouching,” in a lowly state, we have the ability to pick ourselves up, recover, achieve and excel.

Tuesday

Parashat Pekudei begins with the accounting which Moshe made of all the precious materials donated for the *Mishkan*, specifying what was done with the gold, silver and copper which the people had given.

The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 51:2), commenting on this section, relates that after the *Mishkan* was constructed, some materials were left over. Moshe turned to God and asked what he should do with the remaining materials, and God instructed, “Go and use them for making a ‘*mishkan la-eidut*’ [‘sanctuary for testimony’].” After that second *Mishkan* was built, Moshe found it necessary to make an accounting, to show the people which materials were used for the primary *Mishkan*, and which were used for this second structure, to which God referred as the “*mishkan la-eidut*.”

Various approaches have been taken to explain what precisely this second Sanctuary was. One possibility emerges from the parallel passage in the *Yalkut Shimoni* (414), which states that God told Moshe to use the excess materials to construct a “*mishkan la-dibrot*” – a place for the “*dibrot*.” While it is not entirely clear to what the *Yalkuut Shimoni* refers, it might be understood as reflecting the minority view of Rabbi Yehuda ben Lakish cited in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:1) that *Benei Yisrael* had two *aronot* (sacred arks) with them in the wilderness. The first was the *aron* which was stored in the *kodesh ha-kodashim*, the inner sanctum of the *Mishkan*, and which contained the second set of stone tablets which Moshe received at Mount Sinai after God forgave *Benei Yisrael* for the sin of the golden calf. But in addition, according to this view, there was a second *aron* in which the *shivrei luchot* – the broken pieces of the original set of tablets, which Moshe shattered upon witnessing the people’s worship of the golden calf – were kept. Whereas the majority view in the Yerushalmi maintains that the *shivrei luchot* were stored together with the second set of tablets in the *aron* in the *Mishkan*, such that just a single ark was needed, Rabbi Yehuda ben Lakish argued that the broken pieces were kept in a separate ark. This view appears to be followed by Rashi in his commentary to Sefer Devarim (10:1). (Rashi there does not mention the *shivrei luchot*, but he does write that *Benei Yisrael* used two separate arks, and it is thus commonly understood that he refers to the view of Rabbi Yehuda ben Lakish.) The Ramban (Devarim 10:5) raises the question of where, according to this view, the second ark was stored throughout the forty years of travel in the wilderness. It seems reasonable to assume that just as the primary ark was stored inside the *Mishkan*, the second ark must also have had a special place where it was stored. As no such place seems to have existed, the Ramban dismisses the view that *Benei Yisrael* had two arks. However, the response to the Ramban’s argument is the passage cited above from the *Yalkut Shimoni*, which speaks of a second *Mishkan*, which was called the “*mishkan la-dibrot*.” The materials that remained after the construction of the *Mishkan* were used, according to this view, for the construction of a secondary *Mishkan*, which housed the ark in which the *shivshiv*

*shivrei luchot* were stored.

This, then, is likely the meaning of the Midrash’s account of God instructing Moshe to use the leftover materials for building a “*Mishkan la-eidut*.” The stone tablets given to Moshe at Sinai were called “*luchot ha-eidut*” (“tablets of testimony” – 31:18, 32:15, 34:29), and in describing the *aron* that was kept in the primary *Mishkan*, God instructed Moshe to place “the testimony [*eidut*] which I will give you” inside the ark (25:16) – referring to the stone tablets. Conceivably, then, the secondary *Mishkan*, which the Midrash calls “*mishkan la-eidut*,” was used to store the *aron* which contained the pieces of the initial tablets, and the Midrash here follows the minority position of Rabbi Yehuda ben Lakish that *Benei Yisrael* had two different arks.

(For a comprehensive discussion of the nature of the secondary *Mishkan*, see Shmuel Hakohen’s article “*Ohel Mo’ied Ha-sheini*” in the journal *Shemaatin*, vol. 100, Shevat, 5750.)

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted an ambiguous passage in the Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 51:2) which tells of God’s instruction to Moshe regarding the leftover materials that remained after the construction of the *Mishkan*. When Moshe realized that not all the materials that had been donated were used, the Midrash relates, he turned to God and asked what should be done with them, and God replied, “Go and use them for making a ‘*mishkan la-eidut*’ [‘sanctuary for testimony’].” As many have noted, this response is very difficult to understand, as the *Mishkan* itself is called “*Mishkan ha-eidut*,” and it was already built. What, then, did God mean by instructing Moshe to use the excess materials for the construction of a “*mishkan la-eidut*”?

The *Chiddushei Ha-Rim* is cited as explaining the Midrash’s comment to mean that the excess materials **had already been used** for the construction of the *Mishkan*. The fact that the people donated so generously, providing more that we needed, testified to their fierce desire to bring God’s presence into their midst and to bond with Him. And this fierce desire, the *Chiddushei Ha-Rim* explained, constituted the core essence of the *Mishkan*. When God replied to Moshe, “Use them for making a *mishkan la-eidut*,” He was saying – according to the *Chiddushei Ha-Rim* – that the emotions expressed through this excess are what made the *Mishkan*. The essence of the *Mishkan* was not the physical structure, but rather the special relationship between God and His people that it represented, and thus the excess materials symbolized the true essence of the *Mishkan*, in that they testified to the people’s boundless love for the Almighty and their longing for a deep connection with Him.

Oftentimes we fail to reach our goals because we do not invest adequate time or effort. On other occasions, however, we make the opposite mistake – we overinvest, putting in more work and devoting more time and attention to an undertaking than the amount which was necessary to complete it. Sometimes we “hyper-focus” and exert too much effort into a particular pursuit. The *Chiddushei Ha-Rim* here teaches that when such mistakes are made, we should realize, at least retrospectively, that even the “excess” was valuable. The time and work which turned out to be unnecessary was not wasted; it was a natural outgrowth of our passion and commitment – and this passion and commitment is what facilitated our success. It is far better to err on the side of excessive work and effort than to risk insufficient work and effort – because the zeal and devotion that produce the excess are, in essence, what ensure that we reach our goals and achieve that which we set out to accomplish.

Thursday

The *Or Ha-chayim* (to Shemot 36:8) advances an intriguing theory about the miraculous nature of the *Mishkan*’s construction, asserting that the final product appeared as the work of a single individual. Often, the *Or Ha-chayim* writes, when a team works together on a project, with each team member crafting part of the product, at least a subtle lack of uniformity results. The various parts will likely not be perfectly identical, as they were produced by different craftsmen. However, the *Or Ha-chayim* writes, the *Mishkan* miraculously appeared pristinely uniform, without any discernible differences. God endowed the artisans with special wisdom that enabled them to produce their assigned portions of the *Mishkan* in perfect accordance with His commands – but also in a manner that fit seamlessly together with all other portions of the *Mishkan*, such that it gave the appearance of having been entirely built by just one person. (The *Or Ha-chayim* advances this theory to explain several textual nuances in the Torah’s account of the *Mishkan*’s construction.)

What might be the significance of this supernatural feature of the *Mishkan*?

Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon suggested that this insight of the *Or Ha-chayim* perhaps reflects the importance of sacrificing a degree of our individuality for the sake of the community. *Am Yisrael* is both a group of separate, distinct individuals, as well as a single, collective unit. Therefore, each member is required to both develop his or her unique character and make his or her unique contribution, while at the same time identifying as part of the aggregate whole of the Jewish Nation. Our commitment to the collective unit of *Am Yisrael* requires us to surrender a small degree of our individuality, of our singular character, for the sake of contributing to our nation’s goals. Practically, this means that when we involve ourselves in communal projects, we must be prepared to forego on our own plans, ideas, wishes and preferences in the interest of cooperation. In order for the “*Mishkan*” to be properly built, all the various “artisans” who contribute must be willing to work as a cohesive unit, to surrender part of their individual selves for the sake of ensuring a perfect final product.

As important as it is for us all to cultivate our individuality and find our unique contribution and role, it is just as important to sacrifice our individuality, however slightly, in working together with our peers for the benefit of *Am Yisrael*.

Friday

Parashat Pekudei begins with the detailed accounting which Moshe ordered of the precious metals that were used in the construction of the *Mishkan*. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (Pekudei 4) notes the irony in the fact that Moshe, of whom God later pronounced, “He is the most trustworthy in all My home” (Bamidbar 12:7), called for an “audit” of the materials donated for the *Mishkan*. God Himself vouched for Moshe’s honesty and integrity, and yet, Moshe found it necessary to have a detailed accounting made of the precious materials which the people had donated, to make it clear what every ounce gold, silver and copper was used for.

The Midrash’s comment touches upon the topic of transparency in the handling of charitable funds. The Gemara in Masekhet Bava Batra (9a) states explicitly that *gabba’ei tzedaka* – the officials who are in charge of the collection and distribution of charity – should be trusted, and not forced to present an accounting of the collected and distributed funds. The principle underlying this *halakha* is that people volunteering their time to care for charitable needs should not be subject to undue suspicion and scrutiny. The value of transparency is outweighed by the concern that imposing demands on community volunteers, and forcing them to work in an uncomfortable atmosphere of suspicion, will discourage people from assuming these important roles. This notion is extended further by the *Tur* (C.M. 95), who rules, citing Rav Hai Gaon, that *gabba’ei tzedaka* are absolved of the requirement to take an oath in situations where such a requirement would normally apply. In certain circumstances, a plaintiff claiming money has the right to demand an oath from the defendant, but Rav Hai Gaon ruled that when the defendant is a *gabbai tzedaka* and the case involves his handling of public funds, he is not forced to swear. As a volunteer public servant, he is given the benefit of the doubt and the people’s trust.

The *Shakh* (Y.D. 257:3) qualifies this rule, asserting that when there are legitimate grounds for suspicion, transparency may be demanded. Although volunteer *gabba’ei tzedaka* deserve the public’s trust, when this trust has been shaken, the officials bear the responsibility of regaining it by providing an accounting of the funds under their charge. Even in such a case, the *Noda Bi-yehuda* (*Tinyana*, Y.D. 157) writes that the community should demand only a general accounting, and the *gabba’ei tzedaka* do not have to provide specific details.

The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* (Y.D. 257:12) clarifies that these *halakhot* apply only to volunteer charity officials. Those who are paid to solicit and distribute funds, however, such as hired directors of charitable organizations, are expected to be fully transparent in the handling of funds. This point is also made by Rav Menashe Klein, in *Mishneh Halakhot* (4:237).

Moreover, this entire discussion applies only on the level of strict legal obligation. The *Tur* (Y.D. 257) writes that in light of the famous principle of “*vi-hyitem nekiyim mei-Hashem u-mi-Yisrael*,” which requires us to try to always be above suspicion, it is proper for *gabba’ei tzedaka* to be transparent and account for all the funds that pass through their hands. The *Bach* notes that this ruling does not appear in the Gemara, but might be sourced in the accounting presented by Moshe of the materials donated to the *Mishkan*. This *halakha* is brought by the Rama, in his glosses to the *Shulchan Arukh* (C.M. 257:2).

Finally, it has been suggested in today’s day and age, when there is a general expectation of transparency, charity organizations and religious institutions should certainly be expected to follow at least the commonly accepted standards of transparency. While the public must show appreciation and respect to those who sacrifice their time for the sake of worthy charitable causes, and avoid casting unwarranted aspersions, nevertheless, the volunteers, for their part, should be fully transparent in accordance with accepted norms.

(Taken from [*Torah Ve-hora’a*, Parashat Pekudei, 5776](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/52_23_76.pdf))

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