**SALT – Parashat Vayakhel – Pekudei 5783 / 2023**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

**In honor of the marriage of our son Gavriel Silverberg to Oriya Mishan.**

**May they be zocheh to build a bayit ne'eman beYisrael!**

Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Pekudei begins with an accounting of the precious metals donated for the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah specifies the amounts of gold, silver and copper that was donated, and how they were used. Introducing this section, the Torah writes, “*Eileh fekudei ha-Mishkan, Mishkan ha-eidut*” – “These are the accountings of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary of testimony…” (38:21).

Rashi, citing the *Midrash Tanchuma*, finds in the repetitive phrase, “*ha-Mishkan, Mishkan ha-eidut*” an allusion to the two Temples that would be destroyed many years later. The Midrash suggests reading the word “*mishkan*” here as a subtle reference to a “*mashkon*” – collateral – and thus the two instances of this word in this verse hint to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, which, in the Midrash’s words, “was taken as collateral in two destructions due to Israel’s sins.” In this verse, which introduces the accounting made of the materials donated for the *Mishkan*, the Midrash detects an allusion to the tragic destruction of both *Batei Mikdash*.

To explain the possible point of connection between this section and the destruction of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, Rav Yaakov Moshe Freiberg, in *Pardeis Ha-Rim*, notes a different Midrashic passage, which provides the background for Moshe’s decision to make an accounting of the precious metals. In *Shemot Rabba* (51:6), the Midrash relates that people suspected Moshe of appropriating some of the donated materials for himself. There were those among the nation who noted Moshe’s robust appearance, and cynically remarked that he was well-fed because of the wealth he attained from the people’s donations. Moshe therefore felt compelled to make a detailed accounting of the precious metals, to defend his reputation against the false accusations that were leveled against him. By linking this introductory verse to the future destruction of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, Rav Freiberg suggests, *Chazal* perhaps seek to draw our attention to the fact that the seeds of the destruction are found in this section – in the baseless suspicions raised about Moshe’s conduct. The Gemara (Yoma 9b) famously attributes the tragedy of the Temple’s destruction to the sin of *sin’at chinam*, baseless hatred among Jews. The origins of *sin’at chinam*, the Midrash here indicates, are found in the dissemination of rumors and accusations about people. *Sin’at chinam* begins when we choose to assume the worst about people, instead of giving them the benefit of the doubt. Hatred is rooted in the way we assess the people around us, in our viewing them with negativity and suspicion, rather than judging them favorably. The Midrash’s account of the cynics who accused Moshe of theft demonstrates how people are capable of – and oftentimes, insist upon – accusing anybody of anything, and finding fault in even the greatest of men. The Midrash therefore links the opening verse of Parashat Pekudei to the future destruction of Jerusalem, teaching us that we cure the ill of *sin’at chinam* by looking favorably upon our fellow Jews, and avoiding negativity and baseless suspicions.

Sunday

The ark in the *Mishkan*, which contained the stone tablets given to Moshe atop Mount Sinai, was covered by a piece of gold called the *kaporet* that featured the images of two *keruvim* (cherubs) protruding from both ends.

*Targum Yonatan ben Uziel*, commenting to Parashat Vayakhel (37:8), writes that the *keruvim* were made “with the wisdom of prophetic spirit.” Apparently, as a number of later writers noted, *Targum Yonatan* felt that producing the *kaporet* with the two *keruvim* on both ends required special “prophetic” powers, as otherwise, this could not be done.

One possible explanation for why the *kaporet* required supernatural assistance emerges from Netziv’s comments in his *Ha’ameik Davar* (25:19) concerning the *keruvim*. Netziv observes that the Torah’s command to form *keruvim* on the *kaporet* appears repetitive. It first instructs, “You shall make two golden *keruvim*” (25:18), and then adds, “And make one *keruv* at one edge, and one *keruv* on the other edge” (25:19). Netziv boldly suggests that the second verse specifies that the two *keruvim* must be formed at the precise same time. Rather than form one *keruv* on one edge of the *kaporet*, and then the second *keruv* on the other edge, they were to be made simultaneously, at the precise same moment. Of course, such a feat is not physically possible, and Betzalel – the chief artisan assigned to oversee the construction of the *Mishkan* – made the two *keruvim* in miraculous fashion (see also Netziv’s comments to Parashat Vayakhel, 37:8). Netziv’s theory explains why *Targum Yonatan* speaks of the *keruvim* being made through prophecy, as a miracle was needed to form both *keruvim* at the precise same time.

Rav Wolf Zicherman, in *Otzar Pela’ot Ha-Torah* (Shemot, p. 687, note 98), suggests that perhaps a miracle was needed for a different reason – because the Torah requires making the *kaporet* and *keruvim* from a “*miksha*” – a single block of gold (25:18). The *keruvim* were not to be formed separately and then attached to the *kaporet*, but rather chiseled from a single block of gold together with the *kaporet*. The only other article in the *Mishkan* that featured this requirement of “*miksha*” was the *menorah*, which was likewise made from a single block of gold (25:31). The Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Behaalotekha, 3), cited by Rashi (25:31), relates that Moshe was unable to fashion the *menorah*, and so it was made miraculously – by Moshe casting a piece of gold into a fire, whereupon the *menorah* came into being on its own. Some commentators (including *Keli Yakar*, Shemot 25:31) explained that chiseling the *menorah* from a single block of gold was too difficult a task to be completed through natural means, and thus a miracle was necessary. Seemingly, Rav Zicherman writes, this should have been true also of the *kaporet* and *keruvim*, which were to be formed from a single block of gold. For this reason, perhaps, *Targum Yonatan* writes that the *keruvim* required a miracle, as there was no natural way to form them from a “*miksha*” of gold.

Other sources, however, do not mention that the *keruvim* were formed miraculously, thus giving rise to the question of why the *menorah* required a miracle and the *keruvim* did not. If the *menorah* could not be produced from a single block of gold without a miracle, then how – if we assume that the *kaporet* was not made miraculously – was the *kaporet* formed through natural means?

Rav Zicherman suggests answering this question based on the symbolism of the *keruvim*, which resembled young children (Sukka 5b). When it comes to raising and educating children, there are no “miraculous” shortcuts. The *menorah* could be made through a miracle, but the *keruvim* – symbolizing the process of childrearing – demands hard work, effort, patience and sacrifice. According to most sources, the *keruvim* were not made miraculously – to teach us that in raising children, we cannot rely on miracles, and must instead invest as much effort and exertion as we can to meet the formidable challenges that arise along the process of childrearing.

Monday

Parashat Vayakhel tells of Moshe assembling *Benei Yisrael* to instruct them to donate materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*, a command which he introduced with a reiteration of the obligation to observe Shabbat. Rashi, based on the *Mekhilta*, explains that Moshe began with the command to observe Shabbat to indicate to the people that the Shabbat prohibitions override the obligation to build the *Mishkan*, and thus the building must be discontinued on Shabbat.

This rule, that the work to build the *Mishkan* is to be suspended on Shabbat, was already inferred by Rashi earlier, in Parashat Ki-Tisa (31:13). There we read that after God completed presenting to Moshe the detailed commands regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*, he told Moshe to impress upon *Benei Yisrael* the importance of observing Shabbat. Rashi explains that God was telling Moshe, “Although I ordered you to command them with regard to the work of the *Mishkan*, do not take [Shabbat] lightly, dismissing Shabbat for this work.” The question naturally arises as to why Rashi would infer the same principle from two different textual sources.

One simple answer, perhaps, as noted by [Rav Asher Weiss](https://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/148_22_82.pdf), is that God conveyed to Moshe this principle in Parashat Ki-Tisa, and Moshe then relayed this information to the people here in Parashat Vayakhel. These two inferences are, in essence, one and the same, and it is made from two different sources because this law was first taught to Moshe who then shared it with *Benei Yisrael*.

Rav Weiss later suggests an additional theory, noting that there are two reasons why one would have intuitively thought that the construction of the *Mishkan* should override the Shabbat prohibitions. The *Mekhilta*, which is the source of Rashi’s comments here in Parashat Vayakhel, states that we might have assumed that work to build the *Mishkan* can be performed on Shabbat just like the *avoda* (service) in the *Mishkan* is performed on Shabbat. Sacrifices which must be brought on a certain day – such as the daily *tamid* sacrifice, which is offered each day – may be brought even on Shabbat, despite the fact that the slaughtering and burning of the sacrifice entails activities which are forbidden on Shabbat. Conceivably, then, we might have assumed that the construction of the *Mishkan* to facilitate these sacrifices should also be permitted on Shabbat. The *Mekhilta* thus inferred from Moshe’s reiteration of the *mitzva* of Shabbat observance in introducing the obligation to build the *Mishkan* that contrary to what we might have figured, the work to build the *Mishkan* was suspended on Shabbat.

Rashi’s earlier inference, Rav Weiss suggests, is needed to dispel a different line of reasoning. The Gemara in Masekhet Yevamot (6a) references this law – that the construction of the Temple does not override the Shabbat prohibitions – in the context of its discussion of the principle of “*asei docheh lo ta’aseh*” – that an affirmative command, as a general rule, overrides a conflicting prohibition. Normally, this principle is limited to situations where the competing prohibition is an ordinary Biblical prohibition, as opposed to prohibitions which carry the severe punishment of *kareit*. As Shabbat desecration carries such a punishment, an affirmative command that necessitates Shabbat desecration does not override the Shabbat restrictions. Nevertheless, in the case of building the *Mishkan*, one might have considered applying the rule of “*asei docheh lo ta’aseh*,” for reasons explained by the Gemara which lie beyond the scope of our discussion. In any event, the principle of “*asei docheh lo ta’aseh*” is a second reason why we might have assumed that the construction of the *Mishkan* should proceed on Shabbat, and it is thus for this reason, perhaps, that Rashi inferred from two separate contexts that this is not the case, and work on the *Mishkan* was to be discontinued on Shabbat.

Tuesday

Parashat Vayakhel begins with Moshe reiterating the command to observe Shabbat, and he specifies the particular prohibition against kindling a fire on Shabbat (35:3). The Gemara (Yevamot 6b) cites a debate among the *Tannaim* as to why this prohibition was singled out in this context. According to one view, “*hav’ara le-chaleik yatzat*” – the Torah chose to specify a particular prohibition to indicate that each of the thirty-nine categories of forbidden activity on Shabbat stands on its own, as an independent prohibition. Rashi explains that we might have otherwise assumed that one is liable for Shabbat desecration only if he performs all thirty-nine activities on Shabbat. The Torah therefore singled out a particular prohibition to instruct that each *melakha* (activity) comprises an act of Shabbat desecration, for which one is liable to punishment (or, in the case of an accidental violation, an atonement sacrifice).

Some writers noted the significance of the fact that this point is made specifically in this context, as part of Moshe’s introduction to the commands regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*. Rashi (35:2), based on the *Mekhilta*, writes that Moshe prefaced these commands with a reiteration of the *mitzva* of Shabbat observance to establish that the work for the construction of the *Mishkan* does not override the Shabbat restrictions, and thus the work must be suspended on Shabbat. The clear implication of this understanding is that if not for this reiteration, one might have intuitively assumed otherwise, that the obligation to build the *Mishkan* supersedes the Shabbat prohibitions. As we discussed yesterday, different reasons have been suggested for why one might have reached this conclusion which Moshe made a point of dispelling. According to the view that “*hav’ara le-chaleik yatzat*,” the explanation might be that if not for Moshe’s instructions, we may have thought that Shabbat desecration occurs only if one performs all thirty-nine categories of forbidden activity. Therefore, the people might have reasoned that as each artisan performed different tasks, the construction can proceed on Shabbat without any Shabbat desecration. Moshe therefore singled out one particular prohibition “*le-chaleik*” – to clarify that each *melakha* has independent significance, and thus each independently constitutes a violation of Shabbat. As such, the work to build the *Mishkan* could not continue on Shabbat.

Like the artisans who build the *Mishkan*, each one of us has his roles to fulfill as part of *Am Yisrael*, and as part of our collective effort to build a nation that would represent God to the world. Each and every person’s contribution is inherently meaningful and significant, even though it achieves only a small portion of the work that needs to be done. At times we might feel discouraged and unfulfilled, as we see the limited impact of our efforts. When we consider that our work comprises just one of the many different “*melakhot*” that need to be completed, we could see ourselves as unaccomplished. The halakhic principle of “*chiluk melakhot*,” which establishes that each *melakha* constitutes an independent, inherently significant act, perhaps reminds us not to belittle the importance of impact of the work we do, all of which helps contribute to the building of the “*Mishkan*” that the Jewish People are to build for the purpose of bringing glory to the Almighty.

Wednesday

The Torah in Parashat Vayakhel tells of *Benei Yisrael*’s enthusiastic response to the call for donations of materials toward the construction of the *Mishkan*. We read about the various pieces of jewelry which the people brought, including *nezem* – nose rings (35:22).

The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 48:6) draws an association between *Benei Yisrael*’s donation of nose rings for the gold to be used for *Mishkan*, and the nose rings which they had given for the golden calf, as we read earlier, in Parashat Ki-Tisa (32:2). In the words of the Midrash, “*Bi-nezamim chat’u, u-ve-nezamim nitratzeh lahem*” – the people sinned with nose rings, and they earned atonement through nose rings. The jewelry they donated for the *Mishkan* served to atone for their donation of jewelry for the sinful purpose of worshipping a graven image.

Rav Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer, in *Chashav Sofer*, suggests explaining the Midrash’s comments on the basis of the contrast between the people’s donations of gold for the golden calf, and their donations for the *Mishkan*. The Torah speaks of the people who donated for the *Mishkan* with the expression “*nediv libo*” (“generous of heart” – 35:5), and the Gemara in Masekhet Chagiga (10a) sees in this phrase an allusion to the concept of *hatarat nedarim* – the annulment of vows. Rashi explains that the Torah here emphasizes that the people brought their donations with a generous heart, without any reservations or regrets for having pledged to contribute, thus implying that if one regrets a pledge, he can seek its annulment. The donations for the *Mishkan*, then, were characterized by firm resolve and certainty. The people never wavered or hesitated, and happily brought their materials for the *Mishkan* without any feelings of misgivings whatsoever. The donations for the golden calf, however, were made in a state of fear and panic. When Moshe did not return from the mountaintop at the time the people expected, they worried that he would never return. Rashi (32:1) cites the Midrash’s description of how the *Satan* misled *Benei Yisrael* by showing them an image of Moshe lying lifeless in a coffin, thrusting the people into uncertainty and dread. Thus, whereas the donations for the *Mishkan* were made with clarity, certainty and resolve, the donations for the golden calf were made impulsively, as a rash response to a frightening situation. The Midrash therefore comments that the donations for the *Mishkan* atoned for the donations of the golden calf – because the people demonstrated that their true desire was to serve the Almighty, and their misdeeds were committed on impulse.

Thursday

We read in Parashat Vayakhel of *Benei Yisrael*’s generous response to God’s command that they donate materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah mentions that it was the *nesi’im* – the leaders of the tribes – who brought the precious stones needed for the *efod* – the *kohen gadol*’s apron – and the *choshen* – the *kohen gadol*’s breastplate (35:27). Both these sacred vestments included stones embroidered within the material, and upon the stones the names of the tribes of Israel were engraved. The Torah tells that these precious stones were donated specifically by the *nesi’im*.

Rashi, citing the *Sifrei* (Naso, 45), writes that the *nesi’im* decided to wait and see what the rest of the nation would donate, and then donate the materials that were missing. It turned out, to their surprise, that the nation brought everything that was needed, leaving for them only the precious stones for the *kohen gadol*’s vestments. Rashi proceeds to cite the Midrash as criticizing the *nesi’im* for failing to join immediately in the donation of materials for the *Mishkan*, charging that “*nit’atzelu mi-tchila*” – the *nesi’im* were initially “indolent” in that they did not donate together with the people.

Rav Yehuda Leib Kalischer, in his *Kol Yehuda*, suggests an explanation for the connection between the stones worn by the *kohen gadol* and the *nesi’im*’s mistake. The stones on the *efod* were embroidered on the shoulder straps, such that the *kohen gadol* appeared to carry the tribes of Israel upon his shoulders, symbolizing his obligation to uplift and inspire the people. The other stones were embroidered on the breastplate, and thus worn on the *kohen gadol*’s heart, symbolizing his obligation to empathize with them and to beseech God for their physical and material wellbeing. These stones, then, reflected the *kohen gadol*’s obligation to engage with the people, to see himself as part of the nation, to concern himself with their needs and with their religious growth. The *nesi’im* are criticized for their condescending attitude toward the people, choosing to bring their donations separately, rather than join the people. The rectification of this mistake is represented by the stones of the *efod* and *choshen*, which reflect the leaders’ responsibility to uplift the people and to have the people in their hearts and minds at all times. The response to the *nesi’im*’s withdrawal from the people was the message of the *kohen gadol*’sstones, that leaders are specifically to join together with their constituents at all times, as leadership is not about rising above the people, but rather about elevating them and tending to their needs to the greatest extent possible.

Friday

We read in Parashat Pekudei (40:2) of God’s command to Moshe to assemble the *Mishkan* on the first day of the month of Nissan. Earlier, the Torah told of the completion of the work to construct the *Mishkan* and its various furnishings, and now we read of the command to assemble the structure on the first of Nissan.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*, 417) relates that the *Mishkan* was actually completed several months earlier, but was not assembled until God issued this command to Moshe on the first of Nissan. During the interim period, people ridiculed Moshe for collecting donations of materials and building an elaborate structure where God would allegedly reside, when in truth, God was not going to reside there. On the first of Nissan, when God commanded Moshe to erect the *Mishkan*, these scoffers were, once and for all, silenced, as the *Mishkan* was assembled and everyone witnessed the spectacle of God’s arrival, as we read in Parashat Shemini (Vayikra 9:24). The Midrash explains that God delayed the assembly and formal inauguration of the *Mishkan* until the month of Nissan because it was during this month when, many years earlier, Avraham was informed that his wife would conceive a child, Yitzchak, after many decades of infertility.

What might be the point of connection between the inauguration of the *Mishkan* and the conception of Yitzchak?

When God first spoke to Avraham and commanded him to settle in Canaan, He promised that after fulfilling this command, Avraham would produce a large nation (“*Ve-e’eskha le-goi gadol*” – Bereishit 12:2). Avraham and Sara were childless at the time, and they remained childless for many more years, despite the promise they had received from God that a large nation would descend from them. When Avraham was finally informed that Sara would conceive, he was shown that the blessings and rewards for fulfilling God’s will do not necessarily materialize immediately, and that we must exercise patience and have faith when we do not see the fruits of our labor. Similarly, God did not immediately take residence in the *Mishkan* after it was completed, to show *Benei Yisrael* the importance of patience and faith. Like the scoffers who ridiculed Moshe, we might at times question the value of the hard work we invest and the sacrifices we make in our service of God. When we do not immediately see the benefits of our observance, we can grow cynical and lose interest. By linking the process of the *Mishkan* to the conception of Yitzchak, the Midrash teaches us that the “dividends” of our investments are not paid immediately, that we need to approach religious observance with strong faith in God’s goodness and feel gratified over the work we perform to build our “*Mishkan*” even when we do not immediately see the results that we desire.