**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT VAYAKHEL**

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Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah identifies the artisan who oversaw the construction of the *Mishkan* as Betzalel, a member of the tribe of Yehuda (31:2, 35:30). The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 40:4) comments that Betzalel was also known by five other names, which are listed in a pair of verses in Sefer Divrei Hayamim I (4:1-2) that name the members of the family of Yehuda’s son, Peretz. Although the names mentioned in these verses appear to refer to different people, the Midrash views them as different names of Betzalel.

One of these five names is Lahad, and the Midrash offers two possible explanations for the meaning of this name. The first is “*she-natan hod ve-hadar al Yisrael*” – “that he brought glory and majesty upon Yisrael” by leading the construction of the *Mishkan*, which was their source of pride and granduer. The second explanation is “*she-ha-dal she-bi-shvatim medabeik lo*” – “that the lowliest of the tribes attached to him.” This refers to the fact that Betzalel, the lead artisan, was from the most distinguished tribe, Yehuda, whereas his assistant, Ohaliav, was from the smallest tribe, Dan (31:6, 35:34).

Quite possibly, these two explanations of the name “Lahad” in reference to Betzalel are to viewed in conjunction with one another, and not as two separate, independent perspectives. The “pride” and “majesty” brought by the *Mishkan* was due not only to the *Shekhina*’s presence, but also to the merging together of all the different tribes, all the various groups of *Am Yisrael*. An integral part of the *Mishkan*, which made it worthy of the Almighty’s presence, was precisely the elimination of socioeconomic boundaries, the blending of Yehuda and Dan, the collective participation of all *Benei Yisrael*, irrespective of their background or social status. From the Midrash’s perspective, glory and majesty are achieved not through exclusivity, by withdrawing and dissociating from those who are perceived to be on a lower stature, but to the contrary, through the merging of “Yehuda” and “Dan,” by looking past the artificial lines that separate between the different groups of *Am Yisrael* and creating a true bond with each and every member of the nation.

Sunday

Towards the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel, we read of Moshe assembling *Benei Yisrael* and conveying to them the command of Shabbat observance, singling out the specific prohibition against kindling a flame on Shabbat – “*lo teva’aru eish be-khol moshevoteikhem be-yom ha-Shabbat*” (35:3).

Rashi cites from the Gemara (70a) two views among the *Tanna’im* as to the halakhic implication of this singling out of *hav’ara* (the prohibition against kindling). One view claims that the Torah singled out this prohibition to lower its severity. Whereas violations of any of the other thirty-eight *melakhot* (forbidden activities) on Shabbat constitutes a capital offense, *hav’ara* – according to this view – is relegated to the status of an ordinary Torah prohibition. According to the other view, the Torah specified one particular Shabbat prohibition in order “*le-chaleik*” – to demonstrate that the thirty-nine *melakhot* should be treated as separate and distinct prohibitions. Thus, if a person did not realize that it was Shabbat, and committed several different *melakhot*, he must bring a separate atonement offering for each *melakha* which he inadvertently violated.

Rav Aryeh Tzvi Frommer of Kozhiglov, in his *Eretz Tzvi*, suggests a deeper insight into the particular significance of the *hav’ara* prohibition. Symbolically, he writes, the prohibition against kindling a flame on Shabbat instructs that on Shabbat, we should not use our own “light,” but should rather use the special “light” provided by Shabbat itself. Shabbat is often referred to as “*me’ein olam ha-ba*” – an experience that in a sense resembles or mirrors the idyllic conditions of the next world. Now Rashi, commenting to the story of the creation of light in Sefer Bereishit (1:4), famously cites the Midrashic tradition that the original light created on the first day of creation was “concealed,” and is reserved for the righteous in the next world. However, as the *Eretz Tzvi* cites from earlier sources, on Shabbat, when we are given a glimpse of the next world, we are allowed, in some sense, to utilize the “*or ha-ganuz*” – the “hidden light” which is normally reserved for the next world. And therefore, the Torah commands us not to kindle our own light on Shabbat – because on Shabbat, we are to make use of the special light to which we are given access on this day.

The *Eretz Tzvi* adds that this concept might be alluded to by the view which states that the Torah singled out the *hav’ara* prohibition “*le-chaleik*” – which literally means “to distinguish.” The pristine light of the next world gives us the perfect clarity we need to definitively and accurately distinguish between right and wrong. In our world, the lines between right and wrong are often blurred; we cannot always trust our intuition and instincts to distinguish between what is proper and what isn’t. Our judgment is clouded by our biases and base desires. In the next world, we will have access to the special “light” which will give us perfect clarity, and which will enable us to immediately discern right from wrong. And thus the *hav’ara* prohibition serves “*le-chaleik*” – to instruct us to use the “light” of the next world which becomes accessible on Shabbat, through which we can more accurately distinguish between good and evil.

Throughout the workweek, as we engage in the world and struggle to earn a livelihood, even as we strive to conduct ourselves according to the Torah’s laws, values and principles, our judgment is likely to be clouded, and our priorities are prone to be skewed. Focused as we are on our daily challenges and rigors, we might lose sight of our ideals and of our ultimate purpose. Shabbat restores the “light” that we might be missing during the week, the clarity of vision and perception, the ability to clearly distinguish between right and wrong, between central and peripheral, between important and trivial. By taking a step back from our weekday pursuits, we are in a position to view life from a purer and truer perspective. And thus, as the Kozhiglover Rav explained, the Torah instructs us not to kindle our own flame on Shabbat, to stop using the “light” of the workweek, to redirect our focus and our refresh our perspective so we have a clearer sense of how we should be living our lives and what our priorities ought to be.

Monday

The Gemara in Masekhet Berakhot (55a) observes that there are three phenomena that God Himself “announces.” One of these phenomena is a “*parnas tov*” – “good leader,” and the source cited by the Gemara is God’s appointment of Betzalel as the chief artisan for the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Torah tells that God Himself singled out Betzalel for this role (Shemot 31:2, 35:30), indicating that He “announces” the appointment of a “*parnas tov*.”

Leaving aside the question as to the significance of this “announcement,” Rav Chaim Zeitchik (cited [by Rav Yissachar Frand](https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5767-vayakhel/)) noted another intriguing aspect of the Gemara’s remark, namely, that the Gemara describes Betzalel as a “*parnas tov*,” highlighting his leadership qualities. After all, God Himself, in pronouncing Betzalel’s appointment, emphasizes his outstanding artistic skill, that He had endowed Betzalel with special talent and wisdom enabling him to perform the work necessary to build the *Mishkan* and its furnishings (e.g. 35:31-33). And yet, the Gemara describes Betzalel not as a good craftsman, but rather as a “*parnas tov*” – a “good leader.”

Rav Zeitchik suggested that the Gemara chose this description of Betzalel because God appointed another talented artisan – Oholiav – to work alongside him (35:34). God specifically wanted Betzalel to “share the spotlight,” so-to-speak, with another gifted individual with whom he would have to work. Rather than work alone, Betzalel was to complete this project in cooperation with a “co-chairman.” Rav Zeitchik thus proposes that the Gemara is pointing to one specific, vitally important quality of a “*parnas tov*” – the ability to work with other people, the willingness to sacrifice the fame and prestige of an exclusive position for the sake of teamwork and the pooling of talent. Several different qualities go into making a “*parnas tov*,” but the one on which the Gemara focuses here is that of partnership and cooperation, using one’s talents in conjunction with other people’s talents, as opposed to insisting on acting alone and receiving all the attention and notoriety. When we are sincerely driven, motivated by a genuine desire to achieve the best outcome, rather than promoting our own reputation, then we are willing to give way to others and share the credit, and this is one of the defining qualities of a true “*parnas tov*.”

Tuesday

The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 35:6) relates that when God showed Moshe how the *Mishkan* should look, Moshe was startled. He turned to God and asked, “Master of the universe! Am I a God, that I can make something like this?” God ambiguously responded by telling Moshe that the *Mishkan* and its furnishings should be built “*be-tavnitam*” (Shemot 25:40) – “in their structure”). To explain God’s response, the Midrash draws a comparison to a king who ordered one of his servants to paint a portrait of his – the king’s – face. The king had an especially striking appearance, and so the servant felt incapable of accepting such a task. “How,” he asked the king, “do you expect me to make a precise replica of your majestic appearance?”

The king replied “*Ata be-samemanekha va-ani bi-khvodi*” – “You have your ingredients [for the paint], and I have My honor.”

In short, the king told the servant to do the best he could with his “*samemanim*,” with the tools at his disposal. The king wasn’t expecting anything more precise than that which the servant’s paints were capable of producing. And this, according to the Midrash, was God response to Moshe’s question, “Am I a God, that I can make something like this?” No, Moshe was not a “God,” and so what was demanded of him was a human *Mishkan*. It was not expected that he and his team of artisans produce precisely what was shown to him; it was expected only that they use the “*samemanim*” at their disposal, that they do the best with what they’ve been given.

*Chazal*’s analogy is instructive with regard to religious life generally. When we consider the kind of “*Mishkan*” that we are to build, the range and extent of obligations we are to fulfill, and the kind of standards we are to maintain, we can easily feel intimidated, and wonder, as Moshe did, “Can I make something like that?” The Midrash here teaches us, very simply, that we just need to do our best. We’ve all been given our unique set of “*samemanim*,” of skills, strengths and circumstances with which to work, and we all have our limitations and our weaknesses with which we need to struggle. As long as we use our “*semamanim*” to the best of our ability, and try to build the best “*Mishkan*” was can, then we doing exactly what is expected of us.

Wednesday

In announcing to *Benei Yisrael* God’s appointment of Betzalel as chief artisan responsible for the construction of the *Mishkan*, Moshe tells the people, “See that the Lord called the name of Betzalel…” (35:30).

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (35:1) takes note of the curious emphasis in this verse on the “calling” of Betzalel’s “name,” and famously comments, “A person is called by three names – one which his father and mother call him; one which people call him; and one which he acquires for himself. The best of all of them is the one he acquires for himself.” The Midrash draws proof to this concept from Betzalel’s selection for a position of stature, which he earned through his “name” – meaning, because of the name he acquired for himself.

These three names listed by the Midrash are commonly understood as referring to the different factors that contribute to a person’s course in life and modes of conduct. The name given to a person by his parents alludes to the expectations which are a function of one’s background and upbringing. People raised in certain kinds of families and communities are naturally expected to follow – and, quite often, do follow – a course that generally resembles those of their families and the communities in which they were raised. Secondly, our course in life is determined to a large extent by the people around us, by the norms and standards of the group or groups with whom we identify and affiliate in the present. But in addition, we acquire a “name” for ourselves – we make independent decisions of how to live and how to conduct ourselves, which are not necessarily dictated by our upbringing or our current surroundings. These are a person’s three “names” – the three primary origins of his conduct and lifestyle: his upbringing, his current social affiliations, and his unique, independent decisions.

The Midrash here teaches us that the most important factor is the final factor, “*ma she-koneh hu le-atzmo*” – the lifestyle decisions which a person makes entirely of his own volition. These decisions are the most difficult ones to make, and require a great deal of courage and self-confidence, but they are also the most valuable, as it is through these decisions that we actualize our unique potential and make our unique contribution which nobody else can make. In certain respects, we follow the path charted for us by our upbringing and our community. But in others, we must acquire our own “name,” charting a course that is uniquely our own and which we independently choose.

Significantly, *Chazal* chose to express this concept specifically in reference to Betzalel. The Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 48:3) teaches that Betzalel was chosen for the role of leading the construction of the *Mishkan* as a reward, of sorts, for his grandfather, Chur, who was killed for defending God’s honor in protesting the worship of the golden calf. Betzalel’s selection for this role was thus a function of his family background, his being Chur’s grandson. And, of course, his job was to lead the construction of the Sanctuary that would be the central site of worship for the entire nation. Betzalel’s role, then, was very much linked to his family background and to the needs of the rest of the nation. We might have expected, then, that his designation would be a function of his first two “names” – his status as Chur’s grandson, and his status as a well-respected member of the nation. And yet, *Chazal* here teach us that he was chosen specifically due to his third “name” – the “name” he acquired for himself, his unique character and achievements, and not his family status or social standing. Even in the capacities of Chur’s grandson and of representative of the people, Betzalel excelled specifically through his independence and uniqueness, through his self-actualization, by maximizing his singular potential. We can bring the most pride to our forebears and make the greatest contribution to our community by finding and utilizing our unique capabilities, by charting our independent path that allows us to fully actualize our unique inner selves.

Thursday

Parashat Vayakhel begins with Moshe’s relaying to the people the command to observe Shabbat, singling out in particular the prohibition against kindling a flame on Shabbat – “*Lo teva’aru eish be-khol moshevoteikhem be-yom ha-Shabbat*” (35:3). Different explanations have been offered for why this prohibition in particular was explicitly mentioned, whereas all the other Shabbat prohibitions are inferred based on the association between Shabbat observance and the construction of the *Mishkan*. For example, Rashi cites one view in the Gemara stating that the prohibition of *hav’ara* (kindling a flame) was singled out to indicate its lower halakhic status, that it does not constitute a capital offense as do the other Shabbat violations. The Ramban suggests that *hav’ara* was mentioned to emphasize that unlike on Yom Tov, when it is permitted to light a fire and perform other *melakhot* (forbidden activities) for the sake of preparing food, on Shabbat these activities are forbidden even for the purpose of food preparation.

The Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Medan *shelit”a*, [offered](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77LZi1KXpfc) a different explanation, suggesting that Moshe specifies *hav’ara* because it constitutes what we might call the quintessential *melakha*. Shabbat observance, at least partially, serves to commemorate God’s cessation of the six-day process of creation. Just as God created for six days and then stopped, we, too “create” for six days and then stop on Shabbat. Rav Medan noted that no act signifies “creation” more than kindling a flame. It is the only of the thirty-nine *melakhot* – and, in fact, the only human action – which creates something *yeish mei-ayin*, ex nihilo. All the other forbidden activities on Shabbat entail the transformation of an object, or combining different substances to produce a different substance. *Hav’ara* is unique in that one creates something entirely new. Certainly, transforming raw food into edible food marks a significant “creation” of sorts, as does the agricultural process, whereby a seed gradually absorbs water and nutrients from the earth and develops into a plant. But in the case of fire, one creates an entirely new entity that did not exist at all. And therefore, Rav Medan explained, *hav’ara* can be described as the prime *melakha*, the one that best embodies the concept of Shabbat – the cessation of our “creative” endeavors to commemorate the cessation of God’s creation of all existence ex nihilo.

Rav Medan added that this unique quality of *hav’ara* might explain why *Chazal* enacted the practice to kindle a flame immediately before the onset of Shabbat, and immediately upon the conclusion of Shabbat. We light candles just before Shabbat begins, and we light a candle for the recitation of *havdala* right when Shabbat ends. The explanation, Rav Medan suggested, might be that we “demarcate” Shabbat by performing the prime *melakha* – the creation of fire – just before and immediately after. By reenacting God’s creation of the world ex nihilo just before we begin Shabbat and just after we end Shabbat, we highlight our commemoration of God’s cessation of creative activity on Shabbat. The act of kindling was specifically chosen for this purpose because it more closely resembles God’s creation of the universe than any of the other creative activities which are proscribed on Shabbat.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Vayakhel describes *Benei Yisrael*’s enthusiastic and generous response to Moshe’s call for the donation of materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*. Amidst this description we find mention of two groups of women who brought spun wool. The first group consisted of “*kol isha chokhmat leiv*” (“every wise-hearted woman” – 35:25), and they brought wool dyed in the various colors required, as well as the necessary linen fabrics. The second group is described as “*ha-nashim asher nasa liban otana be-chokhma*” (“the women whose hearts stirred them with wisdom” – 35:26), and these women spun the goats’ wool. This wool was required for the *yeri’ot izim* – the curtains that formed the second of the four layers of cloths that covered the *Mishkan* (36:14).

Rashi, citing the Gemara (Shabbat 74b, 99a), explains that this second group of women were exceptionally skilled, and managed to spin the wool while it was still on the goats’ bodies. Conventionally, of course, the wool is first sheared from the animal and then processed before it can be spun. These women, however, managed to spin the wool directly from the goats’ bodies.

Various theories have been offered to explain why such an unconventional method of spinning was necessary. Some, including the Maharsha (Shabbat 98b), Rav Yehonatan Eibshitz (*Tiferet Yehonatan*) and Rav Meir Simcha Ha-kohen of Dvinsk (*Meshekh Chokhma*), suggested that this method was followed to allow even women who were ritually impure (due to menstruation) to participate. Woolen fabrics are susceptible to *tum’a* (ritual impurity), but wool is not susceptible to *tum’a* as long as it is still attached to the animal’s body. Therefore, even those who were impure were able to produce the woolen fabrics by spinning the wool directly from the animal.

Others explained that this was simply a matter of *zerizut* – alacrity. These righteous women wanted to complete the work as quickly as possible, and they thus found a way to accelerate the process by skipping the stage of shearing.

A different approach is taken by Seforno, who explains, quite simply, that the less wool is handled, the fresher and whiter it is. The women therefore spun the wool directly from the goats in order to minimize the amount of handling that would be necessary to prepare the curtains, thereby enhancing its appearance.

This approach is followed by Rav David Pardo, in his *Maskil Le-David*, who notes that this explains why this method was used only for producing the goats’ wool, and not for the sheep’s wool. All the sheep’s wool, Rav Pardo notes, was dyed in various colors (“*tekheilet*,” “*argaman*” and “*tola’at shani*”), and thus nothing was gained by maintaining its pristine, natural white color, as in any event it was all dyed. The goats’ wool, however, was not dyed, and thus the aesthetic quality of the *Mishkan* was enhanced by the preservation of the wool’s natural color as much as possible.

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