



Temple was commanded only in response to the Gold Calf: a concession to man's need to worship God in tangible practice.

Sforno

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Weekly Parsha

Vayakhel

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Prohibition against Melachah on Shabbat and Yom Tov

You should not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat. (Shemot 35:3)

This pasuk tells us that one may

(continued on next page)



SHMOS IN REVIEW

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi - Young Israel of Phoenix

Popularity is Not an Indicator of Truth

Parsha Ki Seesah begins with the commandment about the proper way to take a census of the Jewish people. The rule is that it is prohibited to count the Jewish people in a straightforward manner. To this day we use indirect methods of counting in order to find out how many Jews are convened at a given time and place. On the surface the reason for this stricture is difficult to comprehend. Counting seems like an ordinary, practical necessity devoid of any ethical implications. Why does Judaism have an issue with it?

In my opinion it has to do with the problem of human insecurity. There is a powerful feeling that while the individual is vulnerable, "in numbers there is strength". Thus every institute, organization, society is always preoccupied with "growth" and "expansion." There is an unspoken feeling that bigger is better and the more members you have the more significant you are. It is because of this that every religion is engaged in proselytizing.

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Dying to Help?



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Avoda Zara 4b:

"Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said, 'The Jews only sinned in creating the Gold Calf so as to encourage repentance in mankind, as it says, 'Would it be so, that the Jewish people would have such a heart to fear Me all their days'.'"

That is quite difficult to understand. The Jews sinned because they caved into idolatry! That is in fact what happened. The Talmud seems to twist facts, justifying one of the worst sins. And Rashi, explaining Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, makes the problems greater:

"This means to say that those Jews were strong willed and ruled over their

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(Vayakhel cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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not kindle a fire on Shabbat. In other words, this pasuk informs us that creating fire – havarah – is one of the thirty-nine forms of melachah – creative work – prohibited on Shabbat. It is odd that the Torah finds it necessary to specify this melachah. The thirty-nine melachot are not enumerated in the Torah. Instead, they are derived from the Mishcan – the Tabernacle. Those functions that were fundamental to the construction of the Mishcan are included among the melachot. Havarah is one of these functions. Therefore, it seems reasonable that the kindling of fire should be one of the melachot. We should not need a special passage to inform us that havarah is a melachah. Why does the Torah specifically prohibit this melachah?

The commentaries offer a number of responses to this question. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno suggests that havarah lacks one of the basic requirements necessary for an activity to be defined as a melachah. All melachot are creative activities. For example, the melachah of writing results in written letters. The melachah of sewing produces stitches. Kindling a flame is fundamentally destructive. The fuel is burned and consumed by the fire. It is not at all obvious that havarah should be included among the melachot. Therefore, the Torah specifies that creating fire is melachah.[1]

Nachmanides offers a different explanation for our pasuk. In order to understand his comments, some background is required. Shabbat is not the only occasion on which melachah is prohibited. It is also prohibited to perform melachah on Yom Tov – a festival. However, the prohibition on Yom Tov does not include all of the thirty-nine melachot. Those melachot that are related to ochel nefesh – those melachot that provide personal pleasure – are permitted. For example, it is permitted to cook on Yom Tov. This is because food provides personal enjoyment. Havarah is permitted on Yom Tov. This activity also is performed for the purpose of personal pleasure and is considered a melachah of ochel nefesh. Why are melachot of ochel nefesh permitted on Yom Tov? One of the fundamental differences between Shabbat and Yom Tov is that the observance of Yom Tov includes a requirement

simchah – happiness. In order to enable us to achieve this state of simchah, the melachot of ochel nefesh are permitted. The observance of Shabbat does not include an obligation of simchah. Nachmanides explains that our passage tells us that kindling fire is prohibited on Shabbat. This pronouncement teaches that the prohibition of melachah on Shabbat differs from the Yom Tov prohibition. On Shabbat, all thirty-nine melachot are prohibited. Even the melachot of ochel nefesh are included in the Shabbat prohibition.

Nachmanides further explains that it is not obvious that melachot of ochel nefesh should be included in the prohibition against melachah on Shabbat. Although the obligation of simchah does not extend to Shabbat, we are obligated in oneg – experiencing joy – on Shabbat. It is reasonable to assume that this obligation of oneg on Shabbat has a similar



impact as the obligation of simchah on Yom Tov. We would expect the obligation of oneg to dictate that melachot of ochel nefesh should be permitted on Shabbat. This is the lesson of our passage. Despite the obligation of oneg on Shabbat, all thirty-nine melachot are prohibited – even those of ochel nefesh.[2]

Nachmanides does not discuss one important question. As explained above, the obligation of oneg on Shabbat is similar to the requirement of simchah on Yom Tov. Because of the obligation of simchah, those melachot related to ochel nefesh are not prohibited on Yom Tov. Why does not the obligation of oneg on Shabbat have the same impact? Why are the melachot of ochel nefesh prohibited on Shabbat?

Before answering this question, it is important to note that the sanctity of Yom Tov and Shabbat is expressed through the prohibition against melachah. All occasions that the Torah describes as sacred are characterized by this prohibition. Therefore, the melachah prohibition is elemental to the definition and character of these days. Our question suggests that there is a basic difference between the obligation of simchah on Yom Tov and oneg on Shabbat. Simchah is not merely an activity in which we engage on Yom Tov. The obligation of simchah – like the melachah prohibition – is part of the definition or character of Yom Tov.

(continued on next page)

Yom Tov is defined as a period of simchah. The requirement to refrain from the performance of melachah must be formulated in a manner that is consistent with and accommodates the simchah element of Yom Tov observance. Therefore, it is impossible for the Yom Tov prohibition of melachah to include the melachot of ochel nefesh. The inclusion of these melachot would be result in an inconsistency in the fundamental character of the Yom Tov.

Oneg is an obligation on Shabbat. However, it is not part of the basic definition or character of the day. In other words, oneg is an activity that we perform on Shabbat. It is not elemental to the character of Shabbat. Therefore, the prohibition on Shabbat of the melachot of ochel nefesh does not contradict the nature or definition of Shabbat. Instead, the obligation of oneg must be fulfilled in a manner that accommodates the sanctity and character to Shabbat. It must be fulfilled without performance of those melachot associated with ochel nefesh.

An analogy will help understand this distinction. A clothing designer is considering fabrics and colors for a suit under design. He envisions a man's suit that will be worn on formal occasions. He chooses a dark wool fabric for the basic design. He then decides he should bring another subtle color into the design and adds a maroon windowpane pattern. Notice that the basic color for the suit was selected based upon the function for which the suit was designed. The second color was selected to enhance the primary one. Similarly, oneg – like the maroon of the suit – is an enhancement; it is not elemental. Therefore, it is observed in a manner that is consistent with the melachah prohibition. In contrast, the obligation of simchah on Yom Tov is comparable to the designer's vision of the suit's use. This purpose is fundamental to the suit's design; its color is selected to accommodate this objective. So too, the Yom Tov melachah prohibition is designed to accommodate the requirement of simchah.

Moshe's Suspension of Contributions for the Mishcan

And Moshe gave orders to make an announcement in the camp, "Let no man or woman bring any more material for the sacred offering." (Shemot 36:6)

The nation responded to the request for donations of materials for the construction of

the Mishcan. These donations were sufficient for creating the Mishcan and all of its components. The craftsmen charged with the fashioning of the Mishcan reported to Moshe that they had received sufficient material. Upon receiving this news, Moshe announced that no more donations should be brought. The commentaries remark that an exact tally was kept of the donations. The purpose of this accounting was twofold. First, it was essential to secure sufficient materials. Second, Moshe did not wish to collect more than was needed. The importance of collecting sufficient materials is obvious. However, the above pasuk emphasizes that Moshe was equally concerned with not collecting excess materials. Once the needed materials were donated, Moshe immediately directed Bnai Yisrael to stop bringing donations. Why was this issue so crucial? Why was Moshe so deeply concerned with not accepting excess donations?

The commentaries offer various explanations. We will consider one of these responses. Gershonides explains that Moshe's concern was based on a principle found in the Talmud. The Talmud in Tractate Ketubot explains that a person should not donate more than one fifth of one's assets to charity.[3] Maimonides extends this principle to the performance of all mitzvot. A person should not spend more than one fifth of his wealth on the performance of any mitzvah. For example, in purchasing an animal for sacrifice, this limit applies. Maimonides offers an explanation for this restriction. A person should avoid being dependant on others for support. Therefore, one should not risk impoverishing himself.[4] Gershonides explains that Moshe's concern was based on this principle. He did not want the people to bring more than was needed. He did not want anyone to become impoverished out of zeal to contribute to the Mishcan.

Gershonides offers an important insight into the restriction against spending an excess of one fifth of one's

wealth in the performance of a mitzvah. He agrees with Maimonides' explanation of the restriction. One should not risk poverty and lose of independence. However, Gershonides asserts that there is a more fundamental explanation of the restriction. He explains that the Torah prohibits the performance of a mitzvah in a manner that leads to evil. Becoming impoverished through contributing to charity or performing a mitzvah is a negative or evil outcome. Gershonides further explains that such an evil outcome discourages others from performing the mitzvah.[5] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 35:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban/Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 35:3.

[3] Mesechet Ketubot 50a.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Erchin VeCharamin 8:13.

[5] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag/Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 444.



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(In Review continued from page 1)

Parsha

ing; they actually believe that numbers mean something, that if more people belong to your religion it increases its validity.

In my opinion Judaism rejects the notion that popularity is an indicator of truth. To the contrary, people are attracted to that which pleases the emotions, not what is objectively true. Judaism does not seek out and initially discourages potential converts. Our numbers are miniscule compared to the other "major religions". Hashem tells us that He did not choose us because of our numbers because "you are the smallest of all the nations." Judaism actually believes that it's very rare for the truth to be popular. Indeed, our father Abraham was called "Ivri" because "all the world was on one side and Avraham was on the other side." The truths he discovered about the existence of G-d and the manner in which we should serve Him were contrary to people's religious emotions and remain so to this day. Judaism does not appeal to man's religious feelings but to the divine soul, the part of him that reasons, understands and comprehends higher truths. It commands us to use our minds in the search for G-d and to seek to ascertain His will not as we would like it to be but as He has revealed it to us in His Torah. Our security does not reside in numbers but is the firm conviction, arrived at through diligent study and effort, that Moshe emes vektoraso emes (Moshe is true and his Torah is true). Shabbat Shalom

Finders Keepers

The main theme of Parshat Mishpatim is the civil laws that govern inter-personal relations and thus assure the smooth functioning of an orderly society. Thus, many of the Torah laws regarding liability for damages and criminal actions are spelled out in great detail. In addition to these regulations, the parsha obligates us in unique acts of kindness to our fellow Jews. For example, we are obligated to assume responsibility and see to the return of the lost object of a fellow Jew. We should appreciate the full significance of this Mitzvah. In our secular society one is not legally bound to return lost objects. As the popular saying goes, "finders keepers losers weepers." Whenever a person goes out of his way and does return a lost wallet or other object of value he is regarded as someone very special. However, a Jew has no option in this matter. It is a Mitzvah of the Torah to care for and return lost objects. It is interesting to pay attention to the language the Torah employs in stating this commandment. The verse says, "If you encounter an ox of your enemy or his

donkey wandering, you shall return it to him." The Torah is referring to the lost object of any fellow Jew. Usually when specifying obligations we have to other Jews the Torah employs the term "friend" or "brother". For example: "You shall love your friend as yourself" or "Do not stand idly by the blood of your brother." The Torah uses this term to teach us that all Jews are part of one family and should regard and treat each other with the concern we would extend to personal friends. Why then in the case of returning lost objects does the Torah single out the property of one's enemy?

Ideally, of course, all of Israel should be one happy family with great mutual respect and affection. Unfortunately, however, we are not quite there yet. We are a very divided people and have not yet elevated ourselves above the sin of baseless hatred. So while we have many friends we sometimes have enemies, or people we dislike intensely. Perhaps they have offended or mistreated us for no good reason and, to put it

bluntly we just "can't stand them." What happens if you notice an object on the street and instantly recognize that it belongs to this "lowlife" who has been treating you in a mean fashion? Your immediate instinct is to simply move on. Why should I have to bother with his lost property? Too bad! He deserves it! The Torah, however, maintains that this is a genuine test of one's character. The truly godly person does not act according to the dictates of his emotions. He doesn't only serve Hashem when it feels pleasant and is in line with his innate sense of right and wrong. He is humble and submits to the will of Hashem who is the ultimate arbiter of what is good and what is evil. The Torah is teaching that we must overcome our natural inclination and act in accordance with the dictates of Hashem even when it is painful to the ego. The one who returns the lost object of his "friend" is performing a very significant Mitzvah. The one who returns the property of his enemy is operating on the highest level of perfection. ■

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Daylight Savings time begins Saturday night

(Dying continued from page 1)

Thought

emotions, and it was unfit for them that their emotions overtook them. But they sinned, as it was the decree of the King that their emotions rule them so as to give encouragement to those [in the future] who wish to repent. For if sinners will say, 'What use is repentance, God won't accept me back', we can reply, 'Go and learn from those who made the Gold Calf, who denied God, and yet, they were forgiven'."

Does Rashi really intend to say that God caused man to sin? That is the furthest thing from the truth. Such a notion rejects the fundamentals of Reward and Punishment, free will, and God's justice. For if God causes man's sins, man should not be punished. Yet, those Jews who created the Gold Calf were killed.

To approach this question, let's address the greatest problem, Rashi's suggestion that the "King decreed" those Jews to build the Gold Calf. Since that is impossible, to what else might "King decreed" refer? Think for a few moments...

I suggest as follows. The "decree" here refers not to the event of the Golden Calf construction and worship. Decree refers to God's design of man. Based on His "decreed" design of the human species, it is inevitable that a sensual being, coupled with a strong desire to relate to God, will not find some idolatrous expression at some point in his or her life. The preponderance of amulets and idols that punctuate myriads of cultures for millennia attest to just how strong this idolatrous emotion is.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi means to say that this event (although committed sinfully) also offers future generations encouragement to repent from their respective sins. For if God forgives sins of the greatest magnitude, He surely forgives lesser crimes.

It is also fitting that Rashi says this sin was the "King's" decree. Meaning, God's very existence contributed to this sin, as if He literally decreed it. The very existence of religious emotion and God's abilities generated this sin. The Jews sought some tangible means of being religious, but they went too far. In fact, Sforno teaches that the Temple is a response and concession to this religious need. God only commanded man in the Temple's construction, once man demonstrated an irresistible desire to be religious in a sinful, tangible expression.

Of course, those ancient Jews did not sin "in order" that others gain encouragement. That is a misconstrued notion of their purpose. But the Talmud is isolating the "purpose" of the creation of the Gold Calf, as if to say the only real purpose that can be derived from here, is a meaningful lesson. In truth, it is preferable that idolatry never occurs. But in this specific instance, God's forgiveness emerges as worthy words to offer sinners. ■

Being a Good Person: That's all God Wants?

What is most appealing to human emotion is naturally most popular. Certainly that's the case when the matter is appealing for many reasons.

Take this notion for example: "God just wants me to be a good person." This appeals to us, as it is self-complimentary and it also fulfills our religious emotion. However, while that statement is true, it is only partially correct. Being good (which requires definition) is not the "total" of God's desire, but only one component of a larger list of obligations. That is the primary error people make. For had God only desired that we are good, and nothing more, the Torah would not be so large! And God never says "All I want is that people are good".

We must also be honest about our motives. Many times, one says this catch phrase in defense of not observing the "complete" Torah. This statement alleviates our guilt for not fulfilling the many laws that so many Jews abandon, like tefillin, tzitzis, Torah study, patient prayer, sexual restriction, modesty, courtesy, strict honesty in business, Lashon Hara, and Shabbos observance.

The number of laws found in the entire Torah is 613. And this does not include any Rabbinic laws. So let's be fair with ourselves and dismiss this false notion that all God wants are "good people". If we wish to be honest, what God wants is that men and women perfect themselves...in all areas. This includes how we treat others, but it does not end there. We must also be good to ourselves.

What is included in being good to others? This covers vast areas, from monetary matters, speech, deeds, war, courts, and under each of these there are dozens of issues that are guided by many Torah laws. So being good isn't so easy! The French doctors who treated Arafat thought they were being good. Can you explain to them why they were not good? Do you have the true definitions and precise rules for deciding when we allow people to die, and when we save them? If you don't, then you do not know what "good" means. Only God can determine this answer, which explains why the world jury is still out on abortion. And since God alone is the creator of life, we cannot answer such questions without consulting

His Torah. Any question about morality must be defined by God – not our subjective whims.

What I wish to emphasize is that most of us are in no position to make determinations about what is good or bad, unless we have studied all of God's words on this matter...and His words fill volumes. And not only are we greatly ignorant about how we are to be truly good to others, but we're also ignorant about how to be good to ourselves. And in fact, this is more important. For we are not always in the company of others, but we are always in our own company. Being good to ourselves is obligatory 100% of the time.

So how does God command that we be good to ourselves?

First and foremost, God desires that we are honest. Living a lie is a wasted life. Thus, God gave us five senses so we might attain accurate perception of the natural world. Studying this universe, we arrive at new insights and truths about the Creator. God created the universe to offer intelligent beings a means by which we may all realize the immense brilliance of the Creator. But God also gave us intelligence. This is because there is another world: the world of ideas, which drives this world, and is where we end up after this life ends. Without intelligence, we cannot make sense of this universe, nor will we earn a place in the afterlife, which endures eternally. That existence also offers us far greater enjoyment than the physical life. For there, no frustration or physical limitations exist. God designed humans to find the greatest fulfillment in the pursuit of knowledge. And this is how we can be good to ourselves, by engaging in the study of the universe, and the Torah. The Talmud also teaches that study is the greatest mitzvah of all.

There is so much more to be said, but for now, let us take the first step and admit that what God wants is no simple matter. And it's not just to "be good" as commonly understood. He wants the best for us, and that is a lifelong task of Torah study, honesty, and fulfilling ALL His mitzvos. Just as we would never ignore a doctor's suggestions, all the more true, we must not ignore God. ■

**RABBI STEVEN PRUZANSKY**

*Spiritual Leader of Congregation Bnai Yeshurun
Teaneck, New Jersey*

Which of the following eligible bachelors makes the most attractive shidduch candidate? Please choose one.

a) a quiet, cerebral, 60 year old who has never left his parents' home, never worked, and is not on speaking terms with his only brother;

b) an impetuous, arrogant, young man, obsessed with his physical appearance, whose family has disowned him, and who has served time in prison;

c) a man adopted and raised by non-Jews, now 45 years old, accused of murder and still a fugitive from justice;

d) none of the above.

If you selected (d) – not an entirely unreasonable choice on its face – you have unfortunately rejected (a) Yaakov Avinu, (b) Yosef HaTzadik, and (c) Moshe Rabbeinu as shidduch-worthy, forever altering Jewish destiny and world history. And such thumbnail sketches could easily uncover similar “flaws” in Avraham Avinu, Dovid HaMelech, and most other luminaries of Jewish life.

Evidently, there is much more substance to a human being than his (or her) pedigree, appearance, educational background, career choice, and social history. More importantly, each person possesses values, goals, aspirations, character, and a spiritual sensitivity (or lack thereof) that comes closer to defining him

CHECK

mate

or her than any information that can be gleaned from the brief biographical data now used to determine one's eligibility, not for marriage, but for a first date.

It is not only the Avot who do not measure up to today's standards; our glorious Imahot (foremothers) also do not fare well. All were raised in idolatrous households, in families whose values were diametrically opposed to those of our covenantal community. Yet, in every case – as well as those spiritual giants mentioned above – their backgrounds were indicators of nothing, and their special personal qualities and unique gifts that sustain us to this day had to be extracted and uncovered through personal contact. In today's parlance, you had to “get to know them”.

In today's world, these men and women do not stand a chance, for they cannot cross the minimum threshold of acceptability. Personality, *chein* (perhaps translated as ‘a special charm’), goodness, and beautiful *midot* are not easily adaptable to a resume. Rather than judge the person on his/her merits, the person is judged on a host of considerations that simply do not define the essential person. And we are all the poorer for it.

I recently had an unpleasant conversation with a male inquirer into a local shidduch. After a series of impertinent questions, I said to him (impertinently): “Why don't you just call her up, and ask her yourself?” He responded that his Rebbi (non-YU, as it happened) had taught him that “it is *assur* – forbidden by Jewish law – to call a woman directly”. Surprised that this halacha had escaped my notice, I said: “Are you certain your Rebbi said that it is *assur*? Especially since the Gemara establishes that men are the initiators – aggressors – in pursuing marriage! How can it be *assur*?”

He conceded that his Rebbi did not actually use the term “*assur*” – that was his assumption – and I urged him to be more careful in his use

of halachic terminology lest he be guilty of “*Bal Tosif*”, adding Mitzvot to the Torah (and presumably falling several notches even lower on the shidduch depth chart).

When did our men become so emotionally emasculated that they hide behind spurious halacha to avoid taking responsibility for their own futures? When did it become a crime to say ‘hello, nice to meet you’ or to strike up a conversation with a young man or woman whose eyes met yours at a wedding, a social gathering, or in shul (i.e., after davening)? What is wrong with checking out the personality of a potential mate through light conversation before conducting the background checks that are designed to weed out miscreants, malefactors, and malcontents of all sorts?

Certainly, there is a fear of rejection – but rejection does build character and is part of life. There is a greater and more troubling fear: The Netziv's famous commentary on “*ezer k'negdo*” (literally, ‘helpmate opposite him’ – the Torah's description of the first wife in Breishit 2:20 – that the wife most benefits her husband when she is different than him in temperament and personality, thereby creating a balance in the marriage) is lost on today's generation. Opposites no longer attract; they don't even get a first date.

The Avot and Imahot were all spared the horrors of the shidduch scene because they married family members. We do not have that luxury. What we can do is foster an environment in which single men and women are judged as people first, and not as checklists. Then, if they find in each other *chein* – in appearance, family and reputation (see Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah, I, 90) – they can commit their lives to each other in full confidence that G-d who makes all matches has blessed their union.

Herein lies the challenge, as well as the potential for unlimited blessing, for our generation and for our future. ■

Weekly Parsha

Betzalel

RABBI DR. DARREL GINSBERG



The commandments had been given by God, the tools were out, the materials assembled, and Bnai Yisrael were ready to take the next step forward in their evolution—the building of the Mishkan. With it would come a means of relating to God that had never existed in the history of mankind. It was a construction project like no other, and the person assigned this extremely difficult task was Betzalel, first introduced to us in Parshas Ki Tisa. It was a job that required a tremendous talmid chacham, with unparalleled scientific knowledge and artistic talent. Clearly, this individual must have stood out from the rest of Bnai Yisrael.

And yet, with everything seemingly set to move forward, a most bizarre discussion takes place between Moshe and Betzalel.

The Torah writes as follows (Shemos 38:22):

“Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah, made all that Hashem commanded Moshe.”

The verse seems quite straightforward, yet Rashi points out an important subtlety:

“That which he (Moshe) commanded him (Betzalel) is not written here, but, rather, “all that God commanded Moshe,” [thereby implying that] even things which his teacher (Moshe) had not told him, his own opinion was in agreement with what was said to Moshe at Sinai.”

At this point, one gets a clear sense that Betzalel possesses a high degree of chachma and insight. Rashi then points us to the Talmud, which has as follows (Berachos 55):

“R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Johanan: Betzalel was so called on account of his wisdom. At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses; Go and tell Betzalel to make me a tabernacle, an ark and vessels, Moses went and reversed the order, saying, Make an ark and vessels and a tabernacle. Betzalel said to him: Moses, our Teacher, as a rule a man first builds a house and then brings vessels into it; but you say, Make me an ark and vessels and a tabernacle. Where shall I put the vessels that I am to make? Can it be that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to you, Make a tabernacle, an ark and vessels? Moses replied: Perhaps you were in the shadow of God and knew!”

This Aggadic piece raises quite a few troubling issues. First and foremost, are we to believe that what defined Betzalel’s chachma was his ability to reverse the order given by Moshe? His argument to Moshe seems to be elementary at best, a debate about different construction techniques. How does this reveal brilliance? Another issue is Betzalel’s concern, namely where to store the keylim. Why not store them under a tarp or in a tent? Is this really a legitimate concern? Furthermore, why did Moshe reverse the order to begin with?

Rashi offers an insight into Moshe’s rationale in switching the order of building the Mishkan. He explains that the commandment to **build** from Mishkan walls to keylim was given over in Parshas Ki Tisa. The original commandment of **design**, however, was given in Parshas Terumah. The order there went from keylim to Mishkan walls. According to Rashi, therefore, Moshe was not actually “changing” the order - rather, he was sticking with the original order. If this is the case, then what exactly was the nature of the debate between Moshe and Betzalel? Why did Moshe choose the original order? Betzalel’s thinking seems pretty intuitive.

Like any Aggada, one must be careful not to approach it literally. As this piece in the Talmud clearly demonstrates, a purely superficial reading leads to conclusions that would equate Betzalel’s chachma to that of an elementary school student. The focus must be on the ideas expressed.

The starting point might be to develop an approach as to the concept of the Mishkan and the keylim. Rabbeinu Chananel (Shemos 25:23) offers an intriguing explanation of the shulchan, the table in the Mishkan. He writes:

“The shulchan references the kings of Yisrael that organize at their tables the great leaders of Yisrael.”

He continues, explaining how each measurement of this kli, its position in the Mishkan, and its design, reflected the idea of kingship. Finally, he writes how this understanding of the shulchan really applies to all the keylim.

What we see from his explanation is the crux of what the Mishkan, and the Beis Hamikdash, represent. There was a beauty and precision to the entire Mishkan, each design artistic and each measurement exact. However, to think that the objective of these instructions was to create an architectural and artistic wonder, and nothing else, would be a severe distortion of that which God intended. Rabbeinu Chananel is pointing out that each measurement and each design was a vehicle to a greater understanding of God. The study of each kli, from the overall structure to the most

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(Betzael continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

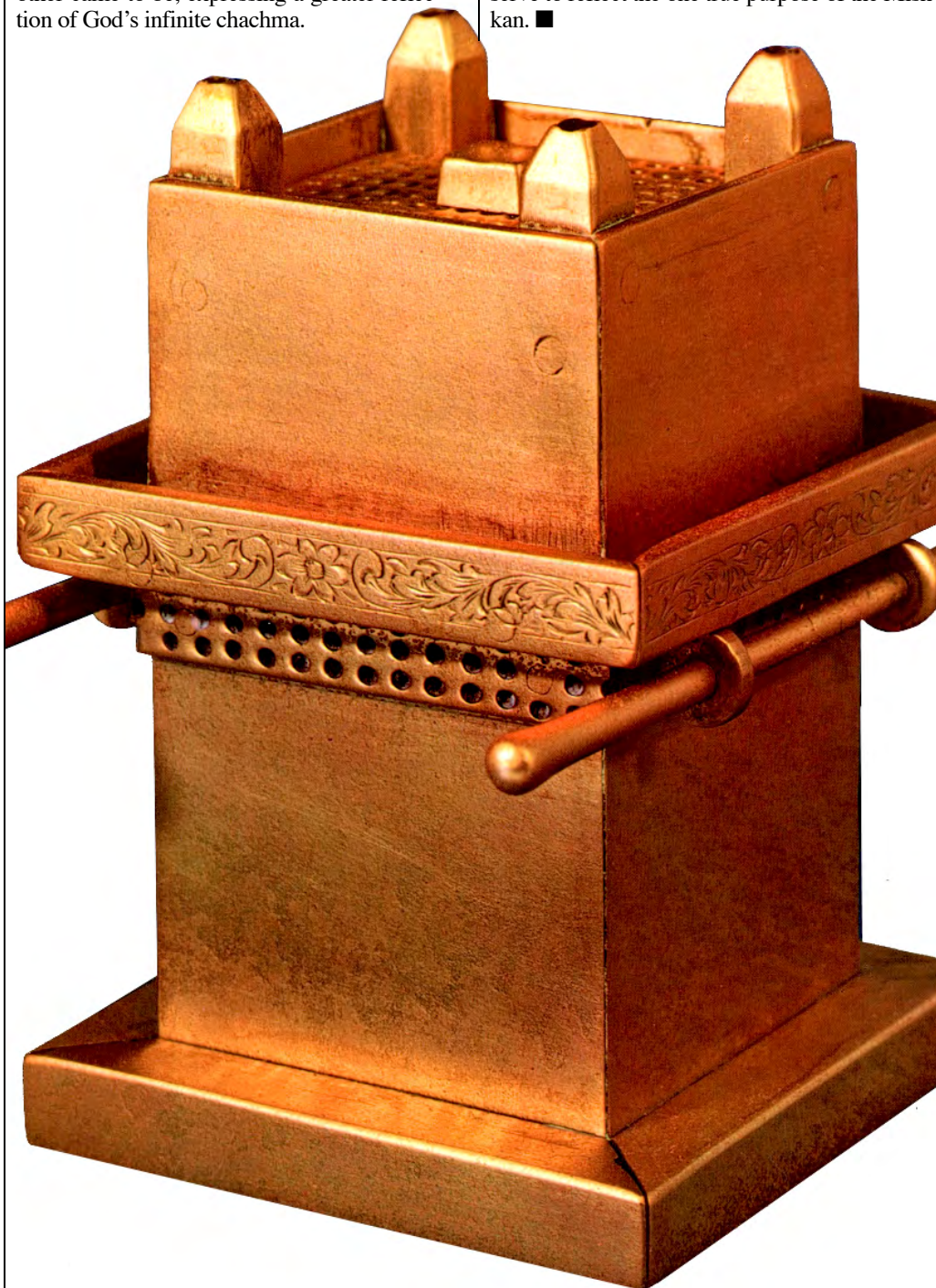
detailed measurement, leads a person down a road replete with chachmas Hashem. The shulchan was but one example, offering insights in the idea of malchus. As a result, one can see that each kli served a most important role, bringing a person to a higher level of yediyas Hashem.

This might help explain Moshe's decision to reverse the order. Moshe had received the commandment to build the Mishkan twice. In Parshas Teruma, he was given the specifics of each kli, going from kli to the outer structure. In Parshas Ki Tisa, when given the commandment to instruct Betzael in the construction of the Mishkan, Moshe was told from Mishkan walls to kli. At this point, there were two legitimate possibilities as to how to proceed. Moshe chose kli to Mishkan walls. Why? It could be that he was concerned about a possible distortion by Bnai Yisrael as to the role of the outer walls of the Mishkan. Building the outer walls in the beginning would signify a purely structural benefit to the keylim. In other words, if the walls were built first, people might think they functioned merely to store the keylim. However, the commandment for the walls, including the precise measurements and designs, came from God. This being the case, the walls themselves had a status as a "kli" - not necessarily in a purely halachic sense, but in the fact they were part of the construct of the Mishkan. The walls too would be studied and analyzed, with chachmas Hashem permeating through their very form, similar to the shulchan. In order to demonstrate that the walls were a kli like the others, Moshe instructed Betzael to follow the order in Parshas Terumah. Bnai Yisrael would therefore view the outer walls in the exact same light as the other keylim.

Betzael, however, had a different perspective. It could be he agreed with Moshe as to the concept of the walls being a kli. However, he also saw the walls having a unique function, one that was not imbued in any of the other keylim. Betzael, in his example of how a house is normally built, was not referring to the normal order in construction. He was referring to a more conceptual concept in how the structure of a house and its different internal "keylim" relate to each other. If one were to set up a couch, bed, table and easy chair in a field, he would have four individual pieces of furniture. Each would have its own function, but there would be no relationship between them whatsoever. However, with four walls and a roof, the different pieces of furniture are now related to each other, producing the entity of a "studio apartment" (for example). The walls are a metzaref, taking the individual components and tying them together. This concept existed in the Mish-

kan. It is true the walls themselves were to be considered as a kli. But Betzael deduced a deeper idea. Each kli had its own chachma to it, each one a portal into a deeper understanding of God. Yet there was another system of chachma that existed as well, namely how the keylim all came together to produce "Mishkan". While the shulchan represented kingship and the menorah represented the chachamim (according to Rabbeinu Chananel), these ideas existed independent of one another. With the outer structure built, a means of relating them to each other came to be, expressing a greater reflection of God's infinite chachma.

The Mishkan and the construction of it was not an ordinary contractor's job that could be planned out by purely practical consideration. It was necessary for Betzael, guided by Moshe's commandments from God, to approach every aspect of the Mishkan's construction from the perspective of the yediyas Hashem the Mishkan would impart. God had offered two seemingly conflicting alternatives, but Betzael, in his chachma, understood that the primary consideration was ensuring that every stage of the building, from the first stone to the final kli, would serve to reflect the one true purpose of the Mishkan. ■




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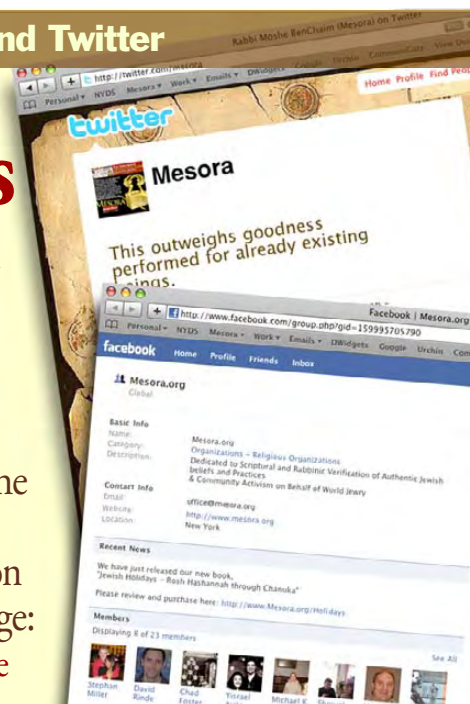
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