

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'hel

Exodus 35:1-38:20

Torah Reading for Week of February 23-28, 2003

The Parshah of Vayak'hel records the actual implementation of G-d's instructions on how to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle), recounted earlier in the Parshah of **Terumah**. Indeed, Vayak'hel is very nearly a **repeat** of Terumah—the same details that in Terumah are prefaced with the words, "And they shall make..." are here presented following the preface, "And they made..."

But first,

Moses assembled the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them: These are the words which G-d has commanded, that you should do them:

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of sabbaths to G-d: whoever does work on it shall be put to death.

You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.

Commentary

AND MOSES ASSEMBLED THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL (35:1)

This was on the morning after Yom Kippur, the day that Moses descended from the mountain [with the Second Tablets].

(Rashi)

AND MOSES ASSEMBLED THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND SAID TO THEM... A SABBATH OF SABBATHS TO G-D (35:1-2)

This teaches us that Moses instituted the practice to assemble on Shabbat to listen to the reading of the Torah.

(Midrash)

SIX DAYS WORK SHALL BE DONE; AND THE SEVENTH DAY SHALL BE HOLY... (35:2)

Here the Torah describes the Jew's work in the course of the week as a passive endeavor—"Six days work shall be done" (not "six days you shall do work"). For the Jew regards his workday endeavors not as the source of his sustenance, but merely as a "vessel" in which to receive G-d's blessing..

(The Chassidic Masters)

SIX DAYS WORK SHALL BE DONE; AND THE SEVENTH DAY SHALL BE HOLY... AND EVERY WISE-HEARTED MAN AMONG YOU SHALL COME AND MAKE ALL THAT G-D HAS COMMANDED... (35:2, 10)

The Donation

Moses then tells the people:

Take from among you an offering to G-d: whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it...

Gold, and silver, and copper;

Blue, purple, and scarlet [wool], and fine linen, and goats' hair;

Rams' skins dyed red, tachash skins, and shittim wood;

Oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense;

Shoham stones and stones to be set for the efod and for the breastplate.

And every wise-hearted man among you shall come, and make all that G-d has commanded...

The **response** was overwhelming:

And they came, everyone whose heart stirred them, and everyone whose spirit made willing, and they brought the offering to G-d for the work of the Tent of Meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments.

They came, the men along with the women... and they

Why does the Torah place the commandment to cease work on Shabbat next to the work of the Mishkan? To teach us that a person is guilty of violating the Shabbat only if the work he does has a counterpart in the work of making the Sanctuary: they sowed (the herbs from which to make dyes for the tapestries); you, too, shall not sow [on Shabbat]. They harvested [the herbs]; you, too, shall not harvest. They loaded the boards from the ground onto the wagons; you, too, shall not bring an object from a public domain into a private domain.

(Talmud and Rashi, Shabbat 49b)

Thus the Mishkan not only defines the type of work forbidden on Shabbat, but also the type of work the Jew is engaged in on the other six days of the week: the work of building a home for G-d out of the materials of physical life.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

GOLD, SILVER AND COPPER (35:5)

"Gold" represents the purity and perfection of the tzaddik. "Silver" represents the great yearning of the Baal Teshuvah ("returnee" or penitent) for closeness to G-d—a yearning many times more powerful than that of the tzaddik, because it is a yearning from afar (kesef, the Hebrew word for silver, also means "yearning"; copper, the lowliest of metals, represents the good deeds of the sinner. G-d's home on earth is complete only when it includes all three.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and girdles, all jewels of gold...

The women brought spun thread of multi-colored wool, linen and goat hair for the roof-coverings and the priestly garments; the tribal **heads** brought the precious stones for the High Priest's apron and breastplate and the herbs for the Anointing Oil and the Incense.

And all the wise men who carried out all the work of the Sanctuary came, every man from his work which they did, and they spoke to Moses saying: "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which G-d commanded to do."

And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp saying: "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing.

The material was sufficient for all the work to do it, and too much.

The Making of the Sanctuary

The team of "wise-hearted" artisans, headed by Betzalel ben Uri from the tribe of Judah and Ahaliav ben Achisamach of the tribe of Dan, set about the task of fashioning these 15 materials into a dwelling for the Divine Presence.

*And they made the ten tapestries of the Mishkan[s roof] of finely-spun linen and [wool dyed] **blue, purple and scarlet**; with cherubim of artistic work did [Betzalel] make them...*

And he made sheets of goat-hair as an Ohel (tent-covering) over the Mishkan—eleven sheets he made them....

And he made the boards for the Mishkan[s walls] of shittim wood, to be stood upright... twenty boards for the south walls; and forty silver foundation-sockets made he under the twenty boards: two sockets under each board, for its two pegs... And for the other side of the Mishkan—for the north side—he made twenty boards and forty silver sockets... and for the rear of the Mishkan, to the west, he made six boards, and two boards for the rear corners...

And he made the Parochet (the "veil" that separated between the Sanctuary's two chambers) of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine-spun linen; with artistically woven cherubim

Commentary

AND THEY CAME, EVERYONE WHOSE HEART STIRRED THEM... BROUGHT THE OFFERING TO G-D (35:21)

It is written, "That which emerges from your lips, you shall observe and do" (Deuteronomy 23:24). From this we know only, if he uttered it with his lips; if he decided in his mind, how do we know that he must keep his promise? Because it says, "Everyone whose heart stirred them... brought the offering to G-d."

(Talmud, Shevuot 26b)

THEY CAME, THE MEN ALONG WITH THE WOMEN (35:22)

The women came first and the men followed.

(Nachmanides)

AND THE TRIBAL HEADS BROUGHT THE SHOHAM STONES (35:27)

When Moses said, "Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, the offering for G-d," and did not say it directly to the princes; they were displeased at not being asked to bring, and so they thought: Let the people bring what they will and we shall make good whatever they omit. But all Israel entered with zeal into the work of the Mishkan and joyfully and enthusiastically brought all the donations. See what is written about this! "And they came, the men along with the women"—they came one on top of another, men and women together in an intermingled throng, and in two mornings they had brought all the necessary donations... The princes then wished to bring their donations but could not, because Moses had already given orders: "...Let neither man nor woman bring any more..." The princes were distressed, and said: "Seeing that

we were not privileged to participate in the offerings to the Mishkan, let us give towards the garments of the High Priest..." This is why when the Mishkan was completed the princes took the initiative, and were the first to bring offerings for its dedication (cf. Numbers 7)..

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THEY SPOKE TO MOSES SAYING: "THE PEOPLE BRING MUCH MORE THAN ENOUGH..." (36:5)

Said Rabbi Aba bar Achah: There's no understanding the character of this people! They're solicited for the Calf, and they give; they're solicited for the Mishkan—they give.

(Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 1:1)

AND THE PEOPLE WERE RESTRAINED FROM BRINGING (36:7)

When so commanded, refraining from doing a mitzvah is no less a mitzvah than doing a mitzvah.

(Alshich)

AND HE MADE THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING... FIVE CUBITS WAS ITS LENGTH, AND FIVE CUBITS ITS BREADTH; IT WAS FOURSQUARE; AND THREE CUBITS ITS HEIGHT (38:1)

"And three cubits its height." Rabbi Judah says: this is meant literally. Rabbi Jose said: Here it says "foursquare" (ravua), and regarding the Incense Altar it also says, "foursquare"; as the Incense Altar's height was twice its length, so here, too, its height was... as the tabernacle was ten cubits high, so was the Altar ten cubits high. How, then, do I understand the verse, "And three cubits its height"? Three cubits from the ledge (a ledge encircled the Altar and served as a walkway for the

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he made it...

And he made a Screen for the doorway of the Tent: of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine-spun linen, with embroidered work...

The Sanctuary's Vessels

And Betzalel made the Ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And he overlaid it with pure gold within and without, and made a rim of gold to it round about....

And he made the Kaporet (the Ark's cover) of pure gold.. and he made two cherubim of gold, beaten out of one piece he made them, on the two ends of the covering... And the cherubim spread out their wings on high, and spread with their wings over the covering, with their faces one to another...

er...

And he made the Table of shittim wood... and covered it with pure gold...

And He made the Menorah of pure gold; of beaten work made he the Menorah, its foot, its shaft, its branches, its goblets, its bulbs, and its flowers, were of the same piece...

And he made the Incense Altar of shittim wood... and covered it with pure gold...

And he made the Anointing Oil holy, and the Incense of Spices pure...

The Outdoor Furnishings

And he made the Altar of Burnt Offering... five cubits was its length, and five cubits its breadth; it was foursquare; and three cubits its **height**...

And he made the Basin of copper, and its pedestal of copper, out of the **mirrors** of the women assembling, who assembled at the door of the Tent of Meeting...

And he made the courtyard: on the south side, he hangings of the court were of fine twined linen, a hundred cubits in length; their pillars were twenty, their copper sockets twenty, and the hooks of the pillars and their trimmings were of silver. And for the north side the hangings were a hundred cubits... And for the west side were hangings of fifty cubits...

Commentary

Kohanim).

(Talmud, Zevachim 59b; Rashi)

AND HE MADE THE BASIN OF COPPER... OUT OF THE MIRRORS OF THE WOMEN ASSEMBLING... (38:8)

The daughters of Israel had mirrors in which they looked to adorn themselves; these, too, they did refrain from donating to the making of the Mishkan. Moses disdained these mirrors, since their purpose is to awaken lust. Said G-d to him: Accept them, for these are more beloved to Me than everything else: through these, the women begot hosts of children in Egypt. When their men were exhausted by hard labor, they would go and bring them food and drink and feed them. They would take along the mirrors, and each would look at herself in the mirror together with her husband and tease him, saying, "Look, I'm more beautiful than you," thus awakening desire in her husband and cohabiting with him and conceiving and giving birth there, as it is written (Song of Songs 8:5), "Under the apple tree I roused you."

(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

THIS THEY SHALL GIVE... HALF A SHEKEL (30:13)

The mitzvah of the half-shekel is that each should contribute a coin that [is valued at] half of the dominant coin of that time. If the prevailing coin is takal, they should give a half-takal; if it is a selah, they should give a half-selah; if it is a darcon, they should give a half-darcon.

(Midrash HaGadol)

Why not a complete coin? To teach us that no man is a complete entity unto himself. Only by joining with another can a person become whole thing.

(The Chassidic Masters)

THIS THEY SHALL GIVE (30:13)

G-d took a coin of fire from under His throne of glory and showed it to Moses, saying: "Such as this they shall give."

(Midrash Tanchumah)

Moses could not understand: How could a mere coin serve a person as "a ransom for his soul to G-d"? G-d answered him by showing him a "coin of fire." G-d was saying: When a person performs even a modest act of charity with the fire of passion and enthusiasm, he is giving a piece of his soul...

(The Rebbe of Kotzk)

Money is fire. Like fire it can destroy and annihilate, or illuminate and warm, depending on how it is used.

(Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk)

THE RICH SHALL NOT GIVE MORE, AND THE POOR SHALL NOT GIVE LESS (30:15)

People differ in their intellect, character, talent and sensitivity. But all

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And you shall appoint it for the service of the Tent of Meeting; that it may be a memorial to the children of Israel before G-d, to make atonement for your souls."

The [width of] the east side was fifty cubits, [with] hangings of fifteen cubits on each side [of the entrance]...

And the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered work, of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine twined linen; and twenty cubits was the length...

*And all the pegs of the tabernacle, and of the court round about, were of **copper**.*

Parshat Shekalim

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the 1st of the month of Adar marked the beginning of the collection of the annual half-shekel that each Jew contributed to the Temple. Thus the Torah reading of the Shabbat that falls on or before Adar 1st is supplemented with the verses (Exodus 30:11-16) that relate G-d's commandment to Moses regarding the first giving of the half-shekel.

When you raise the head of the children of Israel after their number, they shall each give a ransom for his soul to G-d...

This they shall give, every one that passes among them that are numbered: half a shekel after the shekel of the Sanctuary -- a shekel is twenty gera -- a half shekel shall be the offering of G-d...

The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel...

Commentary

are equal in the very basis of their bond with G-d: their intrinsic commitment to Him. So while every man contributed to the making of the various components of the Sanctuary in accordance with their individual capacity, all gave equally of the silver of which its foundation was made. As regards the foundation of the relationship between man and G-d, the rich man cannot give more, and the pauper cannot give less.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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COMMUNITY, INDIVIDUALITY, AND
FRUSTRATION

This week's Torah reading, *Vayak'hel* (Exodus 35:1-38:20), and next week's reading, *Pekudei* (ibid. 38:21-40:38), are replete with questions and contradictions. The first enigma is the question of why these Parshiot exist at all. Most of their content seems completely superfluous.

The Torah is very mincing with words: laws whose details cover many pages in the Talmud are expressed by the Torah in a single sentence or word, or even by means of a single extra letter. But when it comes to the Mishkan, the sanctuary made by the people of Israel in the Sinai Desert, the Torah does a very unusual thing: it elaborates. And then it elaborates some more.

First (in the Parshiot of *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*) we get a description of every one of the Sanctuary's dozens of components as spelled out in G-d's instructions to Moses. And then we get all the details a second time, in the account of the Sanctuary's actual construction in the Parshiot of *Vayak'hel* and *Pekudei*. The most amazing thing is that these two descriptions are virtually identical! The only real difference is that in the first account, the description of each item begins, "And they shall make...", and in the second account it begins, "And they made..."

The Sanctuary is the prototype of the "dwelling for G-d in the physical world" whose construction constitutes our mission in life. That's why the details are so important. But why do they have to be related twice? Couldn't the Torah simply say, "And the Children of Israel built it exactly as G-d had commanded"?

Why It's Frustrating Having a Brain

Having a brain means that you not only know how things are, but you also understand how things ought to be. Which means that you're constantly being made aware that things are not as they ought to be.

Human beings (most of whom have brains) deal with this frustration in a variety of ways. Some

become "academics", which means that they concentrate on the way things ought to be and make believe that that's the way things are. Those who for some reason (usually job-related) are compelled to deal with the way things are, try not to think about the way things ought to be. Since neither approach can be maintained 100% of the time, human beings enjoy a higher stress level than cows, for example.

This has led humans to invent all sorts of salves and balms for stress, on the one hand, and all sorts of devices to do away with (or at least numb) the brain, on the other. Which is a shame, since it's great having a brain, and it's healthy to experience stress.

That's the lesson implicit in the "superfluous" chapters of *Vayak'hel* and *Pekudei*.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the Torah wants to emphasize that there will always be two versions of G-d's home on earth: the ideal version, as G-d envisions it and describes it to Moses, and the real version, as it is actually built in and out of our physical lives.

Does this mean that G-d is making allowances? That His vision can be compromised by "the way things are" down here? But *both versions are exactly the same* in the Torah's account! In other words, we are empowered — and expected — to *recreate* the divine ideal in its entirety, down to every last peg, clasp and carrying pole, within the material world.

Recreate — not duplicate. G-d does not want us to transform physical matter into substanceless spirit; He wants us to make the *physical* world hospitable to His presence.

Being human means never ceasing the effort to translate the ideal into the real. Not that we can eliminate the gap between matter and spirit. We can do better: we can make our lives a physical version of the divine vision. Human life is an attempt to achieve the impossible — an attempt that fails, and in failing, achieves something even greater.

If you're experiencing stress, you're doing something right.

The Second Enigma: Transposed Headings

The second enigma of the Parshiot of *Vayak'hel*

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and Pekudei concerns the names by which they are called, and an apparent contradiction between each Parashah's name and its content.

To the casual reader, the names by which the 54 sections of the annual Torah-reading cycle are called seem quite incidental: a Parshah is almost always named after the first distinctive word to appear in its text. Chassidic teaching, however, which sees every event and phenomenon as specifically determined by Divine Providence, rejects the very concept of "incidence." Furthermore, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Chassidism teaches that the name of an object in the Holy Tongue constitutes its soul and essence; the Rebbe also points out that the word *torah* means "instruction," implying that there is nothing in Torah that is not instructive. Hence, the Rebbe concludes, there certainly cannot be anything "incidental" about the name of a section in Torah.

At his weekly Shabbat *farbrengens* the Rebbe would often dwell on the name of the Parshah read that week, demonstrating how this single word or phrase indeed enfolds within it the entire breadth and variety of the Parshah's contents, and how this Parshah's name, when its nuances are analyzed and set against the other components of the Jewish calendar with which it intersects, carries a wealth of information and instruction to our daily lives (for two examples, see *Life after Death* and *Learning to Laugh*)

Vayak'hel means "assembly" and "community," while the word *Pekudei* connotes itemization and individuality. So these two Parshiot, which follow each other in the Torah — and on certain years are even joined together to form a single reading — express the conflict, interaction and paradox of these two components of the human soul: a) our need and desire to bond together in a communal identity; b) our need and desire for an individual identity distinct and unique from our fellows.

But the most amazing thing about *Vayak'hel* and

Pekudei is not that both are given equal prominence in the Torah; nor that they appear in the Torah in such proximity to each other; and not even that these seemingly dichotomous concepts are often fused to form a single reading called "*Vayak'hel-Pekudei*". The most amazing thing about these two Parshah names is that they seem to have switched places.

If we look beyond these names to the actual content of their respective Parshiot, we discover that the content of the Parshah that carries the name *Vayak'hel* would seem to be most appropriately named *Pekudei*, while the content of the Parshah of *Pekudei* begs the name *Vayak'hel*!

Vayak'hel begins by telling how Moses assembled the people to command them on the observance of Shabbat and the making of the Sanctuary; this act of assembly gives the Parshah its name (*vayak'hel* means "and he assembled" and is a form of the word *kahal*, "congregation"). But the remainder of the Parshah is filled with the particulars of the Mishkan's construction. Each of the Sanctuary's dozens of components is individually listed and described: its roof coverings, wall panels, foundation sockets, pillars, braces, brackets and curtains; the Ark, the Table, the Menorah, the two Altars, even the washbasin and its pedestal. We are given the exact dimensions of these components, the materials out of which they were made, the details of their design.

Pekudei means "accounts," and the Parshah begins with the statement, "These are the accounts of the Mishkan..." The etymological root of *Pekudei*, *pakod*, means to count, to remember, and to appoint — all expressing the concept of itemization, of particular attention to detail (in modern Hebrew, a *pakid* is a bureaucrat). But while *Pekudei* also includes details of the Sanctuary's construction (specifically, those of the priestly garments), a major part of the Parshah is devoted to the Mishkan's assembly. In *Pekudei* the Torah relates how the components listed and described in *Vayak'hel* were fitted together to form the Sanctuary, and how the Divine Presence came to dwell in the completed structure. Indeed, the *parts* of the Mishkan, even as each was fashioned in perfect concurrence with its divine specifications, could not house the Divine Presence until they were assembled to collectively form the whole Mishkan.

In other words, the Parshah of *Vayak'hel* is taken

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up with the individual natures of the Sanctuary's parts, while Pekudei describes how these combine to form the greater structure — the very opposite of what each Parshah's name means!

Five Lessons

To summarize:

- 1) The Torah includes a Parshah called Vayak'hel, and a Parshah called Pekudei.
- 2) On certain years they are joined as a single reading, called "Vayak'hel-Pekudei."
- 3) On other years, these two Parshiot form two separate Torah-readings, read on separate weeks.
- 4) Vayak'hel means "community," but the content of this Parshah is the value of individuality. Pekudei means "individuality," but its content is the advantage in union and integration.
- 5) Vayak'hel comes first in the Torah, followed by Pekudei.

Each of these nuances, says the Rebbe, is significant. Each illuminates the relationship between our individual and communal identities:

The First Lesson: We have and need them both.

The fact that the Torah contains two Parshiot, one called Vayak'hel and the other called Pekudei, means that our need for communality and our striving for individual distinction are both important and desirable components of the human soul.

The Second Lesson: We can, and should, achieve a synthesis of the two. If Vayak'hel and Pekudei were only to appear in the Torah as two separate Parshiot, this would imply that while both are necessary, each has its time and place: that there are times when our communality must be emphasized (to the negation of our individuality), and there are times when an assertion of individuality is called for (albeit disruptive to our communality). We would not know that the two could be integrated.

The fact that, on certain years, Vayak'hel and

Pekudei are joined to form a single reading, teaches us that we can, and should, achieve a synthesis of the two: a community that is not a faceless mass but a community of individuals, each contributing his or her distinct personality and capabilities toward the communal goal, with the community, in turn, providing the framework within which each can strive for his or her personal best.

The Third Lesson: We most also nurture each of the two as a thing of value in and of itself. On the other hand, if Vayak'hel and Pekudei were to appear *only* in their joint form, this would imply that the only desirable objective is the achievement of some sort of balance between these contrasting drives—a balance that may well entail a compromise of one or the other (or of both). Perhaps our individuality has value only in that it contributes in some way to the community; or perhaps the sole function of the community is to provide a framework for the development of the individual. We would not know that each is also an end unto itself.

The fact that Vayak'hel and Pekudei also appear in the Torah as two *separate* readings teaches us that — in addition to the objective of integrating the two — individuality and community are viable objectives in their own right as well. Individual perfection has value independently of how this contributes to the communal good; and the creation of a community is likewise an end unto itself, for it represents a state of being that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The Fourth Lesson: Each consists of the other. We have seen how community ("Vayak'hel") and individuality ("Pekudei") each represent a desirable goal, and how they can be integrated to form a third model, a community of individuals ("Vayak'hel-Pekudei"). But the Torah goes even further. It tells us that even when each is considered as an end unto itself, the two are inexorably bound with each other.

This is the lesson to be derived from the fact that the content of "Vayak'hel" is the nature of individual things, while "Pekudei" contains the description of how diverse parts are joined into a greater whole. The Torah is telling us even when the objective is solely the creation of a perfect community, the most perfect community is a community comprised of individuals who are fully in touch with and exercis-

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ing their individuality (as Vayak'hel, even as a Parshah on its own, is comprised of manifestly individual parts). And the Torah is telling us even when the objective is exclusively the realization of individual potential, an individual can optimally actualize his uniqueness only as a member of a community (as the Parshah of Pekudei *includes* the creation of community).

The Fifth Lesson: Imperfect individuals make a perfect community. The question remaining is: Which should come first?

Logic would seem to dictate that individual development ("Pekudei") should come before community building ("Vayak'hel"): first one needs the parts, and then one can assemble these parts into the greater organism. So the initial emphasis, it would seem, should be on the perfection of the individual, after which these perfected individuals could be knit into the ideal community.

The Torah, however, places Vayak'hel before Pekudei, teaching us that the very opposite is the case: our very first objective, concludes the Rebbe, must be to bring people together, regardless of their individual state. Personal perfection will follow, fostered by the love and fellowship we show towards each other.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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PASSIVE LABOR

One of the greatest paradoxes of a life of faith concerns the need to work for a living. If G-d is the source of all blessings, why toil to earn a livelihood? And if we do work, how can we avoid the thought that it is our labor alone that produces material results? We seem torn between absolute passivity and the denial of G-d's involvement in the world.

Thus the believer engages in what can be termed "passive labor." In the opening verses of Vayak'hel, Moses instructs the people of Israel:

Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of sabbaths to G-d...

Not "Six days shall you work," but "Six days shall work be done." The passive form suggests that even during the week's six workdays, when the Jew is permitted and obligated to work, he should be occupied, but not *preoccupied* by his material endeavors.

This is how Chassidic teaching interprets the verse (Psalms 128:2), "If you will eat the labor of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you." What King David is implying, say the Chassidic masters, is that the labor in which a person engages for his material needs (so that "you will eat") should be only "of your hands" — an activity of the outer man, not an inward involvement. One's "hands" and "feet" should attend to one's material endeavors, while one's thoughts and feelings remain bound up with G-dly things. This is the same concept as that implied by the verse, "Six days shall work be done." One does not *do* the work; it is "done," as if of its own accord. The heart and mind are elsewhere, and only the person's practical faculties are engaged in the work.

The Jew works not to "make a living," but only to fashion a *keli* ("vessel") to receive G-d's blessings. This is what the Torah means when it says, "And the L-rd your G-d will bless you in all that you do." Man is not sustained by his own efforts, but through G-d's blessing; it is only that G-d desires that His blessing should realize itself in and through "all that you do." Man's work merely provides a natural channel for the divine blessing of sustenance, and man must at all times remember that it is no more than a channel. Though his hands prepare the channel, his mind and heart must remain focused on the source of the blessing.

The Chassidic masters take this a step further. In truth, they say, man should really not be allowed to work at all. For of G-d it is said, "I fill the heavens and the earth" and "The whole earth is full of His glory." The proper response to the ever-present

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nature of G-d would be to stand in absolute passivity. To do otherwise would be to be guilty of what the Talmud calls “making gestures before the king.” If a person standing in the presence of a king were to do anything other than devote his attention to the king, he would surely forfeit his life. So it is only because the Torah itself permits, indeed commands, “Six days shall work be done” and “The L-rd your G-d will bless you in all that you do,” that work is permissible and desirable. But to go beyond the level of involvement sanctioned by the Torah — beyond the “passive labor” of making a “vessel” — that would be, in the first place, to show a lack of faith that human sustenance comes from G-d; and secondly, it would be “making gestures before the king” — an act of rebellion in the face of G-d.

The Double Shabbat

This explains the phrase *shabbat shabbaton* — “a sabbath of sabbaths”—used by Moses in the above verses. Shabbat is not a day of rest following six days of active labor. Rather, it is a “sabbath of sabbaths,” a Shabbat following six days that are themselves “sabbaths” of sorts — days of *passive* labor, in which one’s work only engages one’s external self with the true focus of one’s attention in a higher place.

Indeed, a true day of rest can only be one that follows such a week. Citing the verse, “Six days you shall labor, and do *all* your work,” the Sages say: “On the Shabbat, a person should regard himself as if all his work were complete.” This is true rest — rest in which one is utterly free of all workday concerns. If, however, during the six days, a person had been *preoccupied* with material concerns, on the seventh day anxieties will invade him; even if his body ceases work, his mind would not be at rest. On the other hand, if he has given his work its proper place during the week, the light of Shabbat will illuminate him, and it will be *shabbat shabbaton*—a Shabbat twice over. For Shabbat will then permeate his whole

week, and when the day itself arrives it will have a double sanctity.

The Day after Yom Kippur

This also explains the context in which Moses addresses the above verses to the assembled congregation of Israel.

Our Sages elaborate on how the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) atoned for and rectified the sin of the Golden Calf. Ostensibly similar (both the Calf and the Mishkan were a “consecration” of physical matter, particularly gold), the Mishkan was, in truth, the very opposite of the Calf: the Golden Calf was a deification of the material, while the Mishkan was a subjugation of the material to serve the Divine. So on the day after the first Yom Kippur, immediately following G-d’s full forgiveness of Israel’s sin, Moses conveyed G-d’s instructions to the people to build Him a “dwelling place” in their midst; that very day, the people donated their gold, silver and copper to the making of the Mishkan.

First, however, Moses gathered the people of Israel and commanded them in G-d’s name: “Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of sabbaths to G-d...” This implies that, like the Mishkan, this commandment is a refutation of, and atonement for, the sin of idolatry.

Maimonides traces the origins of idolatry to the fact that Divine providence is channeled through natural forces and objects. The original idolaters recognized that the sun, moon and the stars derived their power to nourish the earth from G-d, yet they attached divine significance to them. Their error was to regard them as objects of worship, whereas they are no more than the instruments of G-d, like “an axe in the hands of the hewer.”

In a certain sense, the excessive preoccupation with business and the material world is also a form of idolatry. For this, too, involves the error of attaching significance to what is no more than a vessel or channel of Divine blessing. The materialist’s preoccupation with material things is a form of bowing the head, of misplaced worship. Only when a person sees his workday effort for what it truly is—a way of creating a natural channel for the blessings of G-d—will his work take the passive form and the focus of his thoughts be on G-d alone.

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This is how idolatry—whether in its overt or its more subtle forms—is atoned. Six days of passive work in the sense of mental detachment and the realization that human work is only an instrument of G-d, culminating in and inspired by a “sabbath of sabbaths” that focuses utterly on the source of our blessings—are the corrective for and the denial of the instincts of idolatry.

Excerpted from Torah Studies
<http://kehotonline.com/scripts/tgij/paper/kehot-item.asp?book=740> (Kehot 1986), an adaptation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talks by Britain's Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks

PARTNER

And the man took a golden ring, a half-shekel in weight; and two bracelets of ten shekels weight of gold for her hands

Genesis 24:22

A half-shekel — to allude to the shekalim contributed by the people of Israel, a half-shekel per head

Rashi, *ibid.*

The first marriage of which we read in the Torah is the marriage of Adam and Eve. Theirs, of course, was a marriage wholly made in Heaven: G-d Himself created the bride, perfumed and bejeweled her, and presented her to the groom. The first instance in which the Torah tells the story of a marriage achieved by human effort is in the chapter that describes the search for a bride for Isaac. Here are detailed the workings of a conventional *shidduch*: a matchmaker (Abraham's servant Eliezer), an investigation into the prospective bride's family and character, a dowry, the initial encounter between the bride and groom, and so on.

The Torah, which often conveys complex laws by means of a single word or letter, devotes no less than 67 verses to the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca.

Many of the details are related twice — first in the Torah's account of their occurrence, and a second time in Eliezer's speech to Rebecca's parents. For here we are being presented with a prototype to guide our own approach to marriage — both in the conventional sense as the union of two human beings, and in the cosmic sense as the relationship between G-d and man.

Half of Twenty

One of the details which the Torah includes in its account is the fact that a ring, a half-shekel in weight, was one of the gifts that Eliezer presented to Rebecca at their meeting at the well in Rebecca's hometown in Aram Naharayim.

Our sages explain that this was an allusion to, and the forerunner of, the half-shekel contributed by each Jew towards the building of the Sanctuary. As G-d instructs Moses in the 30th chapter of Exodus:

Each man shall give the ransom of his soul to G-d... This they shall give: ... a half-shekel... A shekel is twenty gerah; a half-shekel [shall be given] as an offering to G-d... The rich man should not give more, and the pauper should not give less, than the half-shekel...

Why *half* a shekel? Maimonides writes that, as a rule, “Everything that is for the sake of G-d should be of the best and most beautiful. When one builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his own dwelling. When one feeds the hungry, he should feed him of the best and sweetest of his table.... Whenever one designates something for a holy purpose, he should sanctify the finest of his possessions; as it is written, ‘The choicest to G-d.’”

Thus, in many cases Torah law mandates that the object of a mitzvah (divine commandment) be *tamim*, whole: a blemished animal cannot be brought as an offering to G-d, nor can a blemished *etrog* be included in the Four Kinds taken on the festival of Sukkot. Even when this is not an absolute requirement, the law states that, whenever possible, one should strive to fulfill a mitzvah with a whole object. For example, it is preferable to recite a blessing on a whole fruit or a whole loaf of bread, rather than on a slice (hence our use of two *whole* loaves at all Shabbat and festival meals).

Why, then, does the Torah instruct that each Jew contribute *half* a shekel towards the building of a dwelling for G-d within the Israelite camp?

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The Torah's repeated reference to this contribution as a "half-shekel" is all the more puzzling in light of the fact that in these very same verses the Torah finds it necessary to clarify that a shekel consists of twenty *gerah*. In other words, the amount contributed by each Jew as the ransom of his soul was ten *gerah*. Ten is a number that connotes completeness and perfection: the entire Torah is encapsulated within the Ten Commandments; the world was created with ten Divine utterances; G-d relates to His creation via ten *sefirot* (Divine attributes), and the soul of man, formed in the image of G-d, is likewise comprised of ten powers. But instead of instructing to give ten *gerah*, the Torah says to give half of a twenty-*gerah* shekel, deliberately avoiding mention of the number ten and emphasizing the "half" element of our contribution to the Divine dwelling in our midst.

Separated at Birth

For such is the essence of marriage. If each partner approaches the marriage with a sense of his or her self as a complete entity, they will, at best, achieve only a "relationship" between two distinct, self-contained lives. But marriage is much more than that. The Kabbalists explain that husband and wife are the male and female aspects of a single soul, born into two different bodies; for many years they live separate lives, often at a great distance from each other and wholly unaware of the other's existence. But Divine providence contrives to bring them together again under the wedding canopy and accord them the opportunity to become one again: not only one in essence, but also one on all levels — in their conscious thoughts and feelings and in their physical lives.

Marriage is thus more than the union of two individuals. It is the *reunion* of a halved soul, the fusion of two lives originally and intrinsically one.

To experience this reunion, each must approach his or her life together not as a ten, but as a half. This half-shekel consists of ten *gerah* — each must give

their all to the marriage, devoting to it the full array of resources and potentials they possess. But each must regard him or herself not as a complete being, but as a *partner* — a part seeking its other part to make it whole again.

The Sanctuary

The half-shekel ring given to Rebecca for her marriage to Isaac was the forerunner of the half-shekel contributed by each Jew towards the building of the Sanctuary, the marital home in the marriage between G-d and man.

The soul of man is "a part of G-d above" — a part that descended to a world whose mundanity and materiality conspire to distance it from its supernal source. So even a soul who is in full possession of her ten powers is still but a part. And even when G-d fully manifests the ten attributes of His involvement with His creation, He is still only partly present in our world. It is only when these two parts unite in marriage that their original wholeness and integrity is restored.

So to build G-d a home on earth we must contribute half of a 20-*gerah* shekel. We must give ourselves fully to Him, devoting the full spectrum of our ten powers and potentials to our marriage with Him. But even as we achieve the utmost in self-realization in our relationship with G-d, we must be permeated with a sense of our halfness — with the recognition and appreciation that we, as He, are incomplete without each other.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
www.therebbe.org; adapted by
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