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Parshat HaShavua sheet

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Parshat Terumah

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A VISION THING

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Among the items that were to be included in the building of the Tabernacle was acacia wood. And though there is no acacia wood in the Sinai Desert, Rashi tells us that 210 years before the exodus, on the journey to Egypt, Yaakov (Jacob) brought acacia trees to be planted in Egypt. He knew that one day the Jews would be liberated and would need a sanctuary in their sojourn. So he prepared wood. Yaakov had not seen his son for 22 years, yet while going to see Yoseph, he brought the material needed for a structure that was to be built years in the future! What prompted Yaakov to think that way? Was there nothing else to bring to Egypt? Why wasn't he worried with the needs of the present? After all, 70 souls were entering a new land and culture. I am sure there were more pertinent things to bring than wood.

The Ponovez Yeshiva in Bnai Beraq is one of the most distinguished Yeshivos in the world. A number of years ago, at the beginning of a semester, a young boy from Switzerland who applied there was denied entry. The Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) told him to come back in a few years, his level of study was not advanced enough for the Yeshiva, and he also was a bit too young. The boy said he understood, but he wanted to speak to the Rebbitzin, the widow of the founder and late Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovez, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahanamen, of blessed memory. The Yeshiva administration was a bit surprised: Rav Kahanamen had passed away a number of years prior, and the young man did not claim to know the Rebbitzin. More important, she had no role in the admission process. Nevertheless, the young man was shown the Rebbitzin's apartment. After a few moments, the boy emerged, and the Rebbitzin asked to speak with the Rosh Yeshiva. It took less than a few minutes, for the Rosh Yeshiva to emerge and motion the young student waiting outside of the Rebbitzin's apartment. "Welcome to Ponovezer Yeshiva," the Rosh Yeshiva heartily declared. "We have decided to accept you wholeheartedly." The boy smiled while many of the students and others who gathered outside the apartment were baffled. "What could have influenced the decision?" they wondered. The young man solved the mystery for the students who had gathered near the Rebbitzin's apartment. "When I was seven years old, one summer my mother and I vacationed at a Swiss mountain resort." Coincidentally, the Ponovezer Rav z'l was in Switzerland for the summer and checked in to the only kosher hotel in the area – the one we were at! The problem was, the only available room was on the upper floor, and it was hard for the Rav to walk up and down. My mother heard about the problem and immediately offered to switch our room on the first floor, with his. After thanking her profusely, the Rav called my mother and me into his new room. "I want to thank you, Mrs. Schwartz," he said. "I understand that when on vacation it is hard to move rooms, but more so I also want to express appreciation to your son. I'd like to buy him a toy in a gift shop. What would he like?" "I told the Rav that I did not want a toy, I did not want any prize. I did not even want a few coins. All I wanted is to become a student one day in the Ponovez Yeshiva. The Rav smiled and said that he would accept me whenever I felt I was ready. Immediately, the Rav took out a pen and paper and wrote the note that I handed to the Rebbitzin today. Frankly, I never even read it. All I know is that the vision of my youth was fulfilled today."

Upon descending to Egypt, Yaakov Avinu knew that redemption would be a long way off. He also understood that one day there would be a Mishkan (Tabernacle) for his children. For without it, the exodus would be meaningless. Yaakov realized that a home for spirituality would be the key to Israel's survival. In Braishis (Genesis), after crossing a river, Yaakov worries about little things he left behind and returns to retrieve them. He worried about the small things that were dear to his children. He worried about the memories of the past. Here, Yaakov worries about what he needs to build the future.

There were flourishing Jewish communities in the early years of American Jewish immigration. The communities that had the vision to bring the wood to build a Mishkan – the home for Torah — are still vibrant and flourishing. For with the vision for spirituality the Jewish people will always have the spirituality for vision.

What Really Counts

by Rabbi Yehoshua Berman

Parshas Terumah begins the series of parshiyos that deal with the process of the construction of the *Mishkan*. Many materials were needed for its construction, amongst them precious materials such as gold and silver.

"And Hashem said to Moshe saying. Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and they shall take for Me a *terumah*, from each man whose heart will move him shall you take My *terumah* (i.e. the contributions). And this is the *terumah* that you shall take from them...(Ex. 25:1-3)."

Rashi notes the different implications of the variant phrasing of the verses. Three times it says to take a contribution from the People; twice the implication is that this contribution is obligatory and one time it implies that it is dependent upon each person's individual desire to give. This, explains Rashi, indicates that there were three different categories of contribution.

There was an obligatory contribution for the silver of the *adanim* (the heavy sockets that anchored the vertical planks of the *Mishkan* that constituted the walls thereof), an obligatory contribution for the purchase of *korbanos*, and one voluntary contribution for the rest of the materials of the *Mishkan* - each individual according to the generosity of his heart.

This seems very peculiar. How are we to understand that concerning the main structure of the *Mishkan*, Hashem made it completely voluntary and dependent on each person's generosity regarding how much to contribute?

Perhaps we may suggest the following approach. If a Yeshiva, for example, wants to erect a magnificent building, it's quite possible that many wealthy individuals will be interested in contributing. The reason for this is that the thought of being a partner in creating a striking edifice that will be imposing in its grandeur and majesty, while at the same time housing a prestigious house of *Torah*, is a prospect that many people can readily relate to and appreciate.

However, when it comes to financing the building's ongoing maintenance, it is often difficult to find people that are happy to contribute. The reason for this is quite simple: there is nothing striking about the fact that there is electricity running through the building's wires or water running through its pipes. That a janitor washes the floors every day is not a fact that provides any immediate sense of magnificence or splendor. These nitty-gritty aspects of ongoing maintenance have a much more behind-the-scenes nature, and as such, can be subject to disregard.

Similarly, there will quite possibly be many people that would be interested in dedicating the "Main Study Hall" or the "Grand Entrance Lobby," but few will be interested in dedicating the electrical room or the janitors' basement supply room. Although these latter aspects of the building are certainly vital to its proper functioning, they lack the external pomp that often provides the interest for significant contributions.

Therefore, there was no need to mandate contributions for the main structure of the *Mishkan* because the attraction of contributing toward the creation of the beautiful tapestries, the clothing of the *Kohanim*, and splendidly gorgeous utensils would provide all the impetus necessary to move the People to contribute handsomely. The silver sockets, however, that were located at the very bottom of the *Mishkan* may not have been as attractive for donors, and therefore needed an obligatory command. Likewise, the sacrifices that are brought on an ongoing basis do not glitter or gleam of silver, turquoise, and gold. So, to fully provide for this aspect of the *Mishkan* it was necessary to make it obligatory.

Now, regarding this point about the sacrifices, we discover something quite striking.

The People were certainly aware that the whole point of the *Mishkan* was to have a central place to carry out the service to worship Hashem. And they were certainly aware that this service was to take the form of bringing sacrifices on an ongoing basis. As such, everyone knew that the sacrifices are essentially the focal purpose of the entire *Mishkan*. Nevertheless, there still may have been some individuals who would lack motivation to contribute properly for the sacrifices, simply for the lack of external "glitter and gleam"!

This is a phenomenon that, as mature, thinking people, we must stop to ponder. Certainly, it behooves a rational-thinking individual to closely analyze this intriguing aspect of human nature.

We all want to experience meaning in life. We all want to feel that our lives carry true significance and purpose. On the other hand, we often find ourselves overly occupied with the externalities of life. By way of illustration: Too often, we find ourselves being more concerned about the look of a frame, and not concerned enough about the actual portrait inside it. Too often, we find ourselves overly concerned with a car's external appearance and not enough concerned with the car's energy efficiency or structural safety. Too often, we find ourselves so wrapped up in snapping that perfect shot to the extent that it distracts us from actually living the moment and enjoying the experience.

What this indicates, is that to uncover the truly meaningful aspects of what we encounter and deal with in life, we must make a deliberate, concerted effort to overcome our tendency to attribute disproportionate significance to external appearances and focus our major concentration and interest on the inner value of the matter at hand.

Doing this will afford us the inestimable ability to properly evaluate each issue and situation; thereby acquiring clarity as to each subject's objective and relative value and how to prioritize varying considerations. This approach to life's journey will certainly, with the help of Hashem, immeasurably aid us to achieve that depth of purpose and meaning for which we all so strongly aspire.

Striking the Right Balance

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

The Torah states regarding the walls of the Tabernacle: "The center crossbar shall go through the middle of the beams, from one end to the other." The Targum Yonasan writes that the center crossbar was made with wood that came from the trees that Abraham planted for the purpose of performing kindness for the travelers. Why was this wood in particular used to take such a prominent position in the Tabernacle? Rav Zelig Pliskin explains that it is to remind us that even whilst we are devoting ourselves to God, we should never forget to have compassion for our fellow man who is created in God's image.

This lesson is stressed in the teachings by the great Torah scholars: One of the great contributions of Rav Yisroel Salanter was that whilst it is highly commendable to place great care on one's observance in the realm of *bein adam l'Makom* (between man and God) nevertheless we should be very careful that this should not be at the expense of others. There are numerous examples of how he put this teaching into practice. On his way to get water for *netilat yedayim* (the ritual washing of the hands), a student passed through some rooms in which people were sleeping. "*Netilat yadayim* is a mitzvah instituted by our Sages," commented, Rav Yisroel, "but robbing others of their sleep is forbidden by the Torah." On another occasion a student began praying a spirited *Shemoneh Esrei* (the standing prayer) whilst standing by the open window on a hot day. Rav Yisroel scolded him for blocking the air for the other people in shul. Another of the great teachers of self-growth, the Alter of Slobodka, also placed great emphasis on mitzvot in the realm of *bein adam l'chaveiro* (between man and his fellow).

Each person needs to be aware in his own performance of mitzvot that he does not unwittingly cause pain or inconvenience to others: For example, when a person is donning his tallis in synagogue for the morning prayers he should be extra vigilant that his *tallis* strings do not strike anyone nearby. Another case is when the *Sefer Torah* is brought out, it is certainly praiseworthy to kiss it, however, if one is likely to push or shove others on the way then the Torah authorities write that the kissing the *sefer Torah* is over-ridden by the requirement not to risk harming our fellow Jew.(4)

Another aspect in which it is important to emphasize one's *bein adam l'chaveiro* as well as *bein adam l'Makom* (between man and God) is in the areas of stringencies. The Ramban discusses the verse in the beginning of the Torah Portion of Kedoshim, where the Torah instructs us to "be holy." The Ramban tells us that it is not enough to keep the basic laws, rather we should strive to reach ever higher levels in our relationship with God over and above the actual technical observance of mitzvot. There is another section in the Ramban that makes a similar point with regard to *bein adam l'chaveiro*. The Torah says, "And you should do what is fair and good in the eyes of God." The Rabbis say that this verse teaches us that we should go beyond the letter of the law in our dealings with other people. The Ramban explains that it is not enough to simply keep the basic laws of mitzvot in the realm of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, rather we must realize that God wants us to treat people with a heightened sensitivity to their needs.

A person may have a tendency to emphasize stringencies in mitzvot of *bein adam l'Makom* such as *kashrut* - this is a tremendous thing when applied correctly. Yet the *Imrei Emet* (the Rebbe of the Chassidic Dynasty of Ger) understood that the concept of stringencies applies just as much to our dealings with other people as to our relationship with God. A *chassid* once asked him if he could borrow a pair of *tefillin* since he had misplaced his own. The Rebbe lent him a pair, but not just any pair. It was his own set of *tefillin*, which had belonged to his father, the *Sfat Emet*. When asked why he gave the *chassid* his most precious set, he answered that, "the Torah says, '*Zeh Keili v'anveihu*' from which we learn that one must do a Mitzva in the most beautiful way possible. This concept applies to kindness as well. That is why I gave him the priceless *tefillin*." (5) The center crossbar in the Tabernacle stood as an eternal reminder that there are two pillars of serving God - *bein adam l'Makom* and *bein adam l'chaveiro*, and even at times of the highest devotion to God it is essential to remember our obligations to our fellow man. May we all merit to strike the right balance.

“Speak to the children of Israel, and have them take for Me an offering; from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering” (25:2)

Rabbeinu Bachya begins his introduction to the parsha with Mishlei 8:10: “Take my lesson and not silver, knowledge rather than the choicest gold.” He writes that by urging the reader to “take” the lesson, Shlomo HaMelech teaches that he should do so actively and with intent, this verse teaches the importance of zerizus, approaching mitzvos with alacrity instead of expending that energy on the accumulation of wealth. We should not adopt a lazy and passive attitude toward mitzvos because that can, at times, be considered sinful. For example, if one prays but all the while thinks about whatever irrelevant thoughts come to mind or contemplates his business and finances, he sins by doing so. Of course he will be rewarded for the mitzvah of prayer, but he will also be held accountable for doing it halfheartedly. Rabbeinu Bachya sees a hint to this in the posuk in Parshas Yisro (20:20): “You shall not make with me gods of silver or gods of gold,” which can also mean: “When you are with me, do not focus on thoughts of money.” The same focus is also necessary while wearing tefillin, which requires a purity of mind and body while they are worn. The bottom line is that we must be fully present and mindful when we do mitzvos. Our parsha also opens by instructing the people to “take” donations for the Mishkan rather than to give supplies. Here too, “taking” implies zerizus, expending effort rather than taking a lackadaisical approach to contributing the needed supplies.

“They shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst” (25:8)

Why does the Torah put so much emphasis on the construction of the Mishkan? Perhaps one reason for this is because the Torah foresaw a future time when there would be no Mishkan or Mikdash and it would be up to the people to build their own sacred places, such as shuls and batei midrash. To make sure that Jews would always strive to create such spaces, the Torah emphasizes the Mishkan and its construction to remind us of the need for a spiritual place in every Jewish community where people can go to focus on prayer and devotion to Hashem. Today, when the shul serves as a stand-in for the Bais HaMikdash, we should make sure to treat it with the same respect that was expected when in the Mikdash. One area in which we can demonstrate this respect is by turning off our phones or, at the very least, silencing them and keeping them out of sight for the duration of the tefillah. This will preserve the sanctity of the space and help us focus on our prayers.

“They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height” (25:10)

When Hashem told Moshe to make the various vessels in the Mishkan, everything was commanded in singular form, taught to Moshe as an individual. The lone exception is the aron, the command for which was given in plural, directed toward the nation as a whole. Why was the aron, the symbol of Torah, communicated to the entire community in this way? Kli Yakar explains that every individual has a share in the Torah represented by the aron. We all can and should claim our share of Torah, which is available to every single Jew. Every person has a portion in it and each should strive to serve Hashem in his own way with the unique talents and abilities that Hashem gave him. No person can say that he does not have to learn Torah or know Torah because the Torah does not belong to a select few individuals. It is the possession of each member of the Jewish people. Furthermore, the Torah is a partnership between those who study and those who support Torah. The supporters also have a significant share in the Torah even if they do not study as much. When the posuk in Mishlei describes the Torah as “a tree of life for those who support it,” it does not say “for those who study it,” because it provides life for all who are involved in it in one way or another. Another idea behind the plural form of this command is that Torah can only be properly studied and understood when one has a teacher. One who studies on his own is liable to make mistakes. The study of Torah requires colleagues, partners, teachers and supporters. It is an endeavor that one cannot undertake single-handedly. Among the 48 prerequisites for the acquisition of Torah listed in Pirkei Avos (6:6) are “closeness with colleagues and debate among the students.” Hashem communicated this important message by addressing the commandment of the aron in plural.

“You shall place the Table outside the Partition, and the Menorah opposite the Table on the south side of the Tabernacle, and the Table you shall place on the north side” (26:35)

The Menorah represents the light of Torah, showing us the way throughout our lives. The Shulchan symbolizes our food, the everyday sustenance that we need. The Menorah was intentionally placed directly opposite the Shulchan because one always has to ensure that his finances are kosher. The light of Torah must always be facing one’s business matters to ensure their compliance with Torah values. Religion and business do interact. A person has to conduct himself in business honestly and appropriately. There is a full section of Shulchan Aruch that deals with business issues and other money matters because the Torah also shows us how to act in business.

by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Go Ahead: Fake It till You Make It

By Chana Weisberg

Want a quick trick to become happy? Try smiling.

In the late 1980s, researchers had subjects hold pencils in their mouths in various ways to mimic smiles or frowns. They discovered that by flexing facial muscles, even without knowing why, their subjects' emotional reactions changed. Those who smiled rated things much more positively than those who frowned. Additional tests gave similar results.

The researchers concluded that though moods are accompanied by changes in the body, it works the other way as well. Make a seemingly insignificant change to your body—like flexing those smiling muscles—and your brain will notice and react accordingly.

So, “fake it till you make it” seems to have some merit.

Interestingly, we find a connection to this concept in this week's Torah portion, when we are commanded to make the ark out of wood and cover it with gold.

They shall make an ark of acacia wood . . . and you shall overlay [the ark] with pure gold, inside and outside (Exodus 25:10–11)

The ark was made out of three boxes that were tucked into each other. The larger, visible box was made from pure gold. Inside was placed a box of acacia wood, inside of which was placed the smallest box, also made out of gold. The tablets with the Ten Commandments were kept in this innermost box.

Like the boxes of the ark, we too are made up of layers. On the inside we are made from “pure gold,” a G-dly soul that is untainted and holy, and wants only to do what's right and good. The next layer is our conscious self—our temperament, moods and feelings. This part of us isn't always so pure or shiny. And finally, there is the outer box, the part of ourselves that we allow the world to see through our actions.

We might feel hypocritical to put on a golden face to the world when inside we're feeling the opposite. Should I act outwardly giving, kind and empathetic when I'm feeling rather “wooden”? Should I present a façade of calmness when I really want to lash out in disparaging anger? Why act in a way that contradicts my true feelings?

But the construction of the ark teaches us that we can improve our feelings through our actions. It's all right to have some “wooden” moments but outwardly act “golden.” Actions create internal change. Act the part, and you become it.

So go ahead and smile, and watch yourself become happier. Give those coins to charity, and witness your mood become more giving and forgiving. Act calmly, and your anger will begin to dissipate.

Because in truth, you aren't really acting. Deep down, your inner self is pure gold.

The Only Thing You Can Take With You Is Your Dining Room Table

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The parsha begins with the first ‘building campaign’ in the history of the Jewish people. “...and let them take for Me (v’yikchu li) a portion from every man whose heart motivates him...” [Shemos 25:2]. Many of the commentaries are troubled by the verb “v’Yikchu” [let them take]. The more appropriate language would be “v’Yitnu” [let them give] a donation.

A number of the commentaries who discuss this choice of words arrive at the same conclusion, namely that the Jewish viewpoint regarding giving charity is different than the common or secular viewpoint. The common attitude towards making a contribution is “I am ‘giving’. It is my hard-earned money. I will GIVE some of my money to charity.”

However, when G-d gave the command to build a Mishkan [Tabernacle], and the “building committee” came to collect money, it was made very clear that nobody was really giving anything of their own. This is because a Jew is supposed to believe that everything that he has in this world is from G-d. This concept can be referred to as prudent stewardship. G-d has made us custodians of His money. He has entrusted it to us. When we make a donation, we are not giving. Rather, the charity collector is taking back that which really belongs to G-d.

Technically, when a charity collector comes to collect money, he should not use the expression “Can you please GIVE me a donation”. Rather, he should say, “I want to TAKE a donation” (I would not advise this from a practical standpoint). This philosophy should make it easier for us whenever we need to give. First of all, it is not ‘ours’. Secondly, there is a famous cliché — and so true it is — we can’t take it with us. The only thing a person will ever take with him from this world will be the mitzvah that he got when he gave to charity.

There is a very powerful Rabbeinu Bechaye later in the parsha. The pasuk in Yechezkel says, “The Mizbayach [Altar] was of wood, three cubits tall and its length was two cubits including its corners; its surface and its sides were of wood. He said to me, ‘This is the Shulchan [Table] that is before Hashem” [41:22]. The pasuk begins talking about the Mizbayach and ends up speaking about the Shulchan. Our Sages say [Brachos 25a] that this hints at the fact that when the Bais HaMikdash [Temple] was standing, a person achieved atonement via the Mizbayach. . Now that the Bais HaMikdash is no longer standing, a person achieves atonement via the Shulchan.

However, the question can be asked: Why does the Shulchan help more than the Aron? When the Bais HaMikdash is no longer standing, the Shulchan that existed in the Bais HaMikdash no longer exists either. Why is the Shulchan better than the Aron, when we have neither of them? The intent is that one’s own dining room table provides atonement.

One’s dining room table can be one’s ticket to the World to Come. The kindness that one performs around his dining room table (by inviting guests and feeding those in need) will be the means by which a person achieves atonement nowadays that we do not have an Mizbayach.

Rabbeinu Bechaye adds that it was the custom of pious people in France to use the wood of their dining room table as building materials for their own coffins. Imagine — being buried in one’s dining room table! Why? The purpose was to teach them that they would not take a dime with them. Nothing will escort us to the next world except the charity that we gave during our life and the kindness that we showed towards others around our table.

This seems to have been an accepted custom in Europe. People wanted to take an item with them which would argue on their behalf as they approached the Heavenly Court. I once heard from Rav Pam, that the honest tailors in Europe used to request that they be buried with the yardstick by which they measured material. The way to ‘cheat’ in the tailoring business 200 years ago in Europe was for the tailor to take as much material for himself as he could get away with (from the material that their customers would bring to them to make clothing). The honest tailors, who never used the yardstick to cheat customers, asked that the yardstick be included in the coffin with them — as a critical defense attorney on their behalf, when they faced their final Judgment.

The only thing we can take with us to the next world is our dining room table — not the physical dining room table, but what we did with it and around it. This is the lesson of ‘taking Terumah’.

Nothing really belongs to us. In the final analysis, nothing will really help us other than the charity that we did around our table.