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The Lower East Side
Parshat HaShavua sheet

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Parshat Pikudei / Hachodesh

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EXACTLY REDUNDANT

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In the final Torah portion that details the completion of the Mishkan, an expression that describes the accomplishment is repeated over and over. In fact, the descriptive assertion is repeated no less than eighteen times!

After the Torah details the completion of each utensil, component, or vestment necessary to finish the Mishkan and begin the service, the Torah uses an expression that declares that they were made "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe."

Again and again the Torah repeats the expression almost verbatim. First, the Torah uses the expression in a general sense when telling us how the vestments were made: "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe." Then it is used again when detailing each garment. The Ephod and its garters, "were made exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe;" the Choshen and its stone setting were made "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe."

The same applies to the vessels of the Mishkan. In addition to a general statement that everything was crafted "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe," the Torah reiterates the expression of perfect conformity in regard to each of the utensils. This goes on for almost every component of the Mishkan!

Why? Would it not have been enough to begin or end the summary with one proclamation that everything was crafted "exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe"? Why restate it so often?

Rabbi Zev Wilenski, shli"ta, recited that a student of Rabbi Boruch Ber Lebowitz, z"l, had undertaken to transcribe the notes of the revered sage to prepare them for print. This work would eventually be known as the Birkas Shmuel, one of the classic exegetical works on Talmudic Law. As the student reviewed the work, he noticed a seeming redundancy of the titles mentioned about Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soleveitchik, the Brisker Rav who was a son of Rabbi Lebowitz's own teacher Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik, and revered as well, by Rabbi Lebowitz. Each time that Rabbi Lebowitz quoted him, he would preface Rabbi Soleveitchik's name with all due titles and accolades, "the true Gaon, Rebbe and Teacher of all of Israel, The Gaon of Brisk, he should live to see long and good days." Even three or four times in one paragraph, Rabbi Lebowitz would repeat the words, each preceded with a slew of praise and reverence, "the true Gaon, Rebbe and Teacher of all of Israel, The Gaon of Brisk, he should live to see long and good days." The next time that Rabbi Soleveitchik was quoted in the works, the student, in the interest of brevity, decided to leave out the seemingly supplementary appellations. Instead he wrote, My Rebbe, the great sage, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soleveitchik, shlit"a. Upon reviewing the work, Rabbi Lebowitz was visibly shaken. "Why did you leave off the introductory appellations? "But, Rebbe," countered Rabbi Lebowitz's student, "I mentioned them the first time. Must I repeat them every single time?" Rabbi Lebowitz was dismayed. "Why am I publishing this book?" he asked in true sincerity. "What do I have from it? Honor? Money? Of course not! I wrote this work so that a student will understand how to learn a Rashba (a medieval commentator) or to understand the Rambam." He paused. "The same way that I want them to understand the text, I also want them to understand to appreciate the greatness of the Rebbe. I want them to see and understand that Rav Yitzchak Zev is "the true Gaon, Rebbe and Teacher of all of Israel."

Perhaps the lesson imparted by each and every action of the Mishkan warrants the Torah's declaration of perfect conformity for a generalized statement does not impact as much as reiteration.

The Torah is mindful that just as we hammer the facts of dimensions and specifications into our minds, just as we ponder the intricacies of the cups and flowers of the Menorah, the forms and staves of the Table of Showbread, the various stones of the Choshen and their placement inside their settings, so too there is one detail we must not miss. And this detail applies with freshness for every Mishkan-related activity: each was exactly as Hashem commanded Moshe.

Knock Your Socks Off

By Rabbi Eli Schiller

"These are the reckonings of the mishkan, the *mishkan* of testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding." (Ex. 38:21)

The *mishkan* and all its holy vessels were completed. Moshe gave the Jewish People a calculation of how he had used every single ounce of gold, silver and copper which had been contributed. The verse opens, "*These are the reckonings...*" which implies that this was considered counting, while some other instance of reckoning was not considered a counting. What is this reckoning coming to reject?

The verse is telling us that the only meaningful use of money is for building God's sanctuaries or for other heavenly purposes. Only such investments are eternal; others are transitory. When a person dies, his Torah and mitzvos accompany him and provide him merits in the world to come, but the money which he spent all his life working for will be left behind.

Before dying, Baron Rothschild handed his children two letters. He instructed them to open one immediately following his death, and the second a month later. They opened the first letter and discovered the following message: "My last request is that I should be buried wearing my socks." Even though his children were perplexed by such a request, they still tried to honor it. They fought hard, but the Rabbis would not allow it and buried him without his socks. After the month had passed, his children anxiously opened up the second letter to discover another message: "I know that you did not bury me wearing my socks as I had requested, since it is against *Halacha*, Jewish Law. You are most probably wondering why, then, did I request it in the first place. My answer to you, my dear children, is to teach you an eternal lesson: a person can spend his life amassing a great amount of possessions and money, but no matter how hard he tries, he cannot even take his socks with him to the next world! Only the money which he used for Torah and mitzvos will accompany him."

Why Every Jew Should Become an Accountant

By Rabbi Berel Wein

The basic lesson in this week's Torah reading is accountability. God demands from Moshe and the others who formulated and created the Tabernacle in the desert, to account for all the material that was donated by the Jewish people for that purpose. The last piece of silver that was donated had to be accounted for, but Moshe was distressed that he could not account for 1000 measures of the silver. He finally remembered that this donation of silver was used for constructing hooks that bound the tapestries of the Tabernacle together.

The hooks must "shout" to remind us of their presence, and to make Moshe's accounting complete and accurate. Accounting is a very painstaking project. Most people view it as bordering on boring. Nevertheless, there is no commercial enterprise that can successfully exist without good and accurate accounting practices.

The financial accounting in our Parsha regarding the materials that were used in the construction of the Tabernacle is a template for proper human behavior concerning the use of resources in all areas of life. This is especially true in matters that border on religious institutions that are held to the highest of all standards and are to be above any suspicion of corruption. The Priest of the Temple wore garments that had no pockets and could not conceal any hidden items of value that might be removed from the Temple.

This overriding meticulous standard and value of accountability is not limited to financial matters. Judaism teaches us that we are all accountable for our actions – behavior, speech, attitudes and even thoughts. We were created as being responsible creatures – responsible to the creator and to the other creatures that exist with us on this planet. We are given talents that are unique to each one of us. The challenge that is put before us is how those talents and abilities can be used for good and noble causes.

There are many who think that the gifts that they have been given are for their exclusive use, and that there is no need or obligation to share them with others. They are sadly mistaken in this view. People are accountable for what they have, as they were for the supposedly insignificant amount of silver that was used to construct hooks that kept the tapestries together.

King Solomon states in Kohelet that one should realize that all actions and behavior will eventually be weighed on the scales of heavenly justice. We live in a time when accountability, to a great extent, has been replaced by excuses, social engineering, economic and psychological theories. All of these are used only to avoid the issue of accountability. To be human is to be responsible, and that is the message not only of this week's Parsha, but of everything in Judaism.

The Almighty Likes Humble Buildings and Humble People

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Towards the beginning of Parshas Pekudei, the Torah says that the entire weight of all the gold that was dedicated to the Mishkan was 29 Kikar and 730 Shekel [Shmos 38:24]. The Sforno writes that this was a small quantity of gold, relatively speaking. The amount was a small fraction of the gold present in the first Bais HaMikdash built by Shlomo HaMelech, which in turn had a fraction of the gold present in the remodeled second Beis HaMikdash built by Herod. Nevertheless, points out the Sforno, the Presence of the Shechinah in the three Sanctuaries (the Mishkan and the two Batei Mikdash) was inversely proportional to the amount of gold present. The Shechina was most acutely felt in the Mishkan of Moshe, less so in the Mikdash of Shlomo, and far less so in Herod's Bais HaMikdash.

The clear lesson, says the Sforno, is that the grandeur of the wealth or the size of the building is not what determines the Presence of G-d amongst the Jewish people. The beauty of a building has nothing to do with whether the Presence of the Shechinah will reside in that building. The Master of the Universe is not impressed with posh and lavish surroundings. The Mishkan, which was temporary — almost a tent like structure, was a poor man's house and yet the Shechinah was always there. The Almighty does not value such things. What G-d wants is people's feelings and devotion. He is not interested in the surroundings.

My purpose in mentioning all this is not to cast aspersions against any congregation with posh design and theater seating. I happen to enjoy comfortable seats. My point is that we should all remember that none of this is what is going to bring down the Shechinah into our synagogues. According to the Sforno writes, the actions and the piety of the people present will bring down the Shechina.

An extension of this is another idea of Chazal: Take heed of the children of poor people (aniyim), for from them will emerge Torah. In this context, 'aniyim' does not merely refer to people who are poor of means. Sometimes we see children who come from backgrounds that are less than stellar and they turn out to be the best students in the Yeshiva. Some of them go on to be great men in Israel.

This is the same thought. They come from humble backgrounds and they are humble people. From them, Torah comes forth. Rav Meir Shapiro once explained that when children from poor families see the sacrifices of their parents to send them to Yeshiva and to afford tuition and the like, it makes a profound impression on the children. When children are aware of all that sacrifice, they approach their learning differently. The common denominator between the thought regarding the gold in the Mishkan and the students from poor backgrounds is that the Almighty appreciates humble backgrounds.

The Soloveitchik dynasty of Torah greatness is well known in the Yeshiva world. It has transcended many generations and continues to this very day. How did this great Torah dynasty get started? I have seen this story written up in many places, most recently in something I read by Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, zt"l, a member of this Torah dynasty.

The dynasty did not start with a great Talmud Chochom, but with a man who was a great business man, named Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, who lived in the time of Rav Chaim of Volozhin. He was in the lumber business and was a fantastically wealthy individual. He gave vast sums of money to charity on an annual basis. All of a sudden, his business took a turn for the worse and he lost everything.

It was such a shocking setback for the Jewish community that Rav Chaim of Volozhin convened an emergency meeting of the Beis Din in Volozhin to determine what Rav Moshe Soloveitchik did that caused Divine disfavor, such that his business suffered such a dramatic reversal. The Beis Din met and deliberated and the only thing they could come up with was that Rav Moshe Soloveitchik gave away too much money to charity! They ruled that he was in violation of the Talmudic dictum that one is not allowed to give away more than 20% of his income to Tzedakah.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin was not satisfied with the conclusion of this Beis Din. At any rate, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik was out of a job, he was out of his business, and he was bereft of his wealth. What could he do? He started learning. He was obviously a very smart man. He no longer had a business, so he went to the Beis Medrash and he learned with the same diligence and the same acumen that made him into this fantastically wealthy person. He became a tremendous Talmid Chochom in his own right. He was the progenitor of the Soloveitchik Torah dynasty.

After that, Rav Chaim Volozhin said "Now I know why he lost his money. Because of his great merit in giving charity, the Almighty wanted to allow him to have the merit of being the patriarch of a great dynasty of Torah scholarship. But (based on the above quoted teaching of Chazal), it is the children of poor people who have the greatest potential for having Torah issue forth from them. Moshe Soloveitchik had a problem. He was too wealthy to have children who would be great in Torah. He lost his money. He became poor. The rest, as they say, is history."

This in fact is the lesson of the Mishkan — the Divine Presence has an affinity for the humble.

“These are the numbers of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted at Moshe’s command; the work of the Levites under the direction of Isamar, the son of Aharon the Kohen” (38:21)

Why is the Mishkan called the “Mishkan of testimony”? Rashi explains that the Mishkan testified to the fact that Hashem had forgiven the nation for the sin of the golden calf. When the people saw that the Divine Presence rested there, they could see clearly that Hashem was happy with them again. Everybody makes mistakes in life. Hashem provided a Mishkan in the center of the Jewish community that testified to the ability to receive forgiveness so that every person who sinned would see that there was hope for Hashem to accept their repentance. Hashem’s willingness to forgive also serves as a model for us to emulate. When people do something bad to us and then apologize, we should follow Hashem’s example and be quick to forgive.

The Torah states that this accounting was done “at Moshe’s command” because it was entirely his idea. Since he had personally overseen the intake of all of the donations for the Mishkan, Moshe wanted to make sure that he was above suspicion, so he voluntarily provided a full accounting of where every ounce of donated material had gone. Moshe’s accounting should serve as an example for each of us. We have all received unique gifts from Hashem, such as our material possessions, intellectual gifts, time on this earth, and many more. We have to hold ourselves accountable for using these gifts well because one day we will have to explain to Hashem how we have wisely utilized all that we have been blessed with. Commenting on the documentation of Mordechai’s lifesaving disclosure of Bigsan and Seresh’s plot to the king, the Midrash says that if a human king records a person’s actions to ensure that he receives a future reward, then certainly the same is true of the Divine King of kings. Whether we like it or not, all of our actions in this world are being written down in Hashem’s book which is a permanent record that will one day be used to determine our eternal reward.

“All the gold that was used for the work – for all the holy work – the offered-up gold was twenty-nine talents and seven hundred thirty shekels in the sacred shekel” (38:24)

The Seforno says that with this calculation, the Torah “testifies that the amount of gold, silver and copper that was gathered for the construction of the Mishkan was a very small amount compared to the wealth of the first Bais HaMikdash and certainly compared to the one built by Herod, which was even more lavish. Despite all this, the Divine Presence was stronger in the Mishkan of Moshe than in the first Bais HaMikdash and was non-existent in the second Bais HaMikdash. With this, the Torah teaches that the extravagance and size of the edifice are not the cause for the presence of the Shechina among the Jewish people. Rather, Hashem favors those who fear Him and their deeds to dwell among them.” A shul or bais medrash may look beautiful, but the sanctity is only found in these nice buildings because of the actions of the people inside of them. This is not in any way meant to negate the importance of beautifying the places where we learn and pray. However, we must keep our priorities straight and understand the true source of the sanctity that fills these special places.

“On the first new moon, on the first of the month, you shall erect the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting” (40:2)

The erection of the Mishkan is mentioned three times in the parsha: once Hashem commands Moshe that “you shall erect the Mishkan,” once it says that “Moshe erected the Mishkan,” and then the Torah also says that “the Mishkan was erected.” The first two describe Moshe putting it together himself, but the third description, in passive voice, implies that it happened by itself without Moshe’s efforts. What is the explanation for this discrepancy? The Midrash Tanchuma explains that the beams of the Mishkan were extremely heavy and it was not humanly possible to lift them. Moshe asked Hashem how he was meant to do this superhuman job and he was told that he should do whatever he could and make it appear that he was lifting it. Once he tried, then it would rise up by itself and stand up straight. Kli Yakar related these three descriptions to the three Batei Mikdash. The first two were built as a result of the merits of the Jewish people. It is as if we did it ourselves. But the third Bais HaMikdash will be built whether or not we are deserving of it. By a certain time, Moshiach will come whether we have earned it or not. In modern times, when we see so many Jews who assimilate or choose not to keep the mitzvos, this should serve as a source of encouragement. Moshiach can still come soon, no matter how dire the circumstances seem and how unworthy we appear to be.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Sing! "Your" Song of Torah

By Sheldon Stern

Verse 38:22 states that Betzalel did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe. Rashi inferred that the prodigy even intuited things that were told to Moshe, but weren't then relayed to him. Our foremost commentator elaborated, based on the Gemara (Berachos 55A.) Moshe told Betzalel that he should first fashion the vessels of the Mishkan and only then build the structure, but his protege said that the way of the world is for people to build a house and only after furnish it. Duly impressed, Moshe told his ward that he was aptly named i.e. you're Betzel Kel, in the shadow of G-d because that's exactly how He told me to do it. The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that the Torah's lessons must have relevance in our lives and so it behooves us to see how this "Tete a Tete" relates to us.

What strikes me is that it mirrors the differing views of Chabad and Aish Hatorah vis a vis Kiruv. Chabad's M.O. is to put Tefilin on the males and give Shabbos candles to the females. The idea is that one should focus on doing the Mitzvoths, which are the vessels, if you will, of Judaism. In contrast, Aish's model is to give lectures that explore the veracity of our religion. So they emphasize the structure of Judaism arguing that once a person recognizes Hashem he'll likely follow His dictates. Given that Moshe conceded to Betzalel, one might assume that the Aish Hatorah paradigm is correct, but not so fast. The concept of Eilu Veilu Divrei Elokim is central to our faith. Yes, the Halacha follows Bes Hillel, but we also recognize the validity of Bes Shammai's views. To that point, sometimes the Aish model works best while for others the Chabad paradigm is superior. One size doesn't fit all in trying to reach out to the religiously unaffiliated.

But I would suggest that there's another factor to consider. Let's imagine we're at an Aish seminar(I'm just using Aish as an example of lecture based Kiruv.) The speaker is likely to ask, "How do we know that ours is the true religion? The conventional answer is that all other religions feature a single charismatic figure who claims to have had an encounter(s) with the Divine. In contrast, 2.5 million Jews heard G-d speak directly to them at Sinai. This is certainly a tenable approach, but I think we can take it one step further. The pope, the Dalai Lama, the Maharishi. For the other religions its adherents live vicariously through these supposed icons. Their followers know precious little save for meaningless clichés and quotes. On the other hand, Judaism is a religious meritocracy. This is best exemplified by Rabbi Akiva, who despite a humble upbringing, rose to the status of our greatest Tanna.

In 1990 I started attending Yeshiva Zichron Eliezer. There was a fellow there who offered me a ride. He had to first clear away some of his Rabbi Miller tapes for me to find a seat. I commented, "You're obviously a big fan. " He proudly responded, "I tell everyone I meet that I don't need my brain I just let the Rav think for me." It's one thing to have a Rav, I have several, it's another to go through life with blinders on. I have a friend on the East Side who enjoys my musical references so I won't disappoint him. In 1973 the Carpenters had a hit with the song, "Sing." It was written in 1971 by Joe Raposo for Sesame Street. I'd like to call your attention to these lyrics. "Sing, sing a song, sing out loud, sing out strong, don't worry that it's not good enough for anyone else to hear, just sing, sing a song." Let's remember, it's 1971. The Beatles magical run had just ended, but Paul Simon and Bob Dylan were still going strong not to mention Elton John, Billy Joel, who were just starting out, the list is unending. So what was the author saying? No I'll never reach their heights, but I have my song to sing and, gosh darn it, I'm gonna sing it." And now more than fifty years later we're talking about it because it was quite a good song. And this is a Moshol for us. While I learned precious little while growing up there were things I picked up. One of them was, "Without Rashi the Gemara would be a closed book for us." I didn't appreciate what that meant, because, at the time, the Gemara was essentially closed to me. However, now, Baruch Hashem I learn and I can say that without Ritva, Rashba, Maharsha the Gaon and a litany of others the Gemara wouldn't have much of a Yiddishe Taam, because they brought so much to it. No, they didn't say to themselves that they're no match for Rashi or Ramban etc. They realized that Hashem gave them certain abilities and they should be shared with the world of Torah.

Oorah has an ad, "Hashem needs every Jew." I would say that He wants every Jew, that is he wants us to stake our claim in Torah. I have another friend on the East Side who I usually see when I spend Shabbos there. Invariably he asks for my weekly Dvar Torah and I comply, and he's very complimentary. A few weeks ago I ran into him during the week and before I could express what I wrote he told me, "This time I've got my own Dvar Torah." He gave it over and it wasn't bad. Chazal teach, "Kinas Sofrim Marbeh Chachmah." This translates to, the jealousy of the book men increases wisdom. It was because the Beatles were so great that the Stones and the Beach Boys worked so diligently to match them and they were also wildly successful. The Gemara teaches, "In the way that a person wants to go Hashem leads him." If you make up your mind that you want a share of G-d's Torah you can and will get it. Anyone who knew me as Sheldon Stern would be shocked by what I'm now writing. I'm grateful to the Shtieble and Bialystoker for allowing me to express my thoughts.

Internalizing the Lessons of Parshas HaChodesh

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

The *Mishna* in *Megilla* tells us that on the Shabbos closest to Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we read the section in the Torah that begins with the first Mitzvah – that of sanctifying the New moon. The most straightforward reason why we read it shortly before Pesach is because it contains the section about the *korban Pesach*. However, the commentaries write that there are a number of other important points that are brought out from this section that relate to Pesach.

Parashas Hachodesh begins, ““This month shall be for you the first of the months, it is the first for you, of the months of the year.” The *Ramban* writes that the Torah is instructing us to count the year beginning from this point in time, which was the beginning of the *yetsias Mitzrayim*. Accordingly, every month’s number will be in comparison to this time. For example, the second month will be viewed as the second month from the date of our redemption, and the third will be the third from the redemption, and so on. By doing this, we will constantly be reminded of the first month and the miracles that took place on that date.

The *Ramban* says that this is similar to how we begin the counting of the week from Shabbos. Each day, when we say the chapter of *Tehillim* that corresponds to its day, we acknowledge the number of this day since Shabbos. For example, on Sunday we say “this is the first day of the week”, meaning that this is the first day since Shabbos. In this way we constantly remind ourselves of Shabbos. This is so important because Shabbos is a sign of Creation, in that HaShem created the world for six days and then rested on the seventh. By constantly acknowledging Shabbos, a person demonstrates that he believes that HaShem created the world.

Given the *Ramban*’s point about the importance of remembering both Shabbos and *yetsias Mitzrayim*, a question arises. Why is it insufficient to merely remember Shabbos, what is the necessity of also focusing so much on *yetsias Mitzrayim*? Indeed, Shabbos reminds us of the act of Creating the whole universe that is a far greater miracle than all the miracles involved in *yetsias Mitzrayim*?

A similar question is asked with regard to the Ten Commandments, and the answers given there can also be used to answer this question. The first Mitzvah in the Ten Commandments is the Mitzvah of *Emuna*, believing in HaShem. The Torah says, “I am the Lord, your G-d, who took you out of the land of *Mitzrayim* from a house of slavery.” The Torah does not suffice in saying, “I am the Lord, your G-d”, rather it adds a specific act that HaShem performed, that of taking the Jewish people out of *Mitzrayim*. The question is asked, that once the Torah is mentioning an act of HaShem, why did it not mention the fact that He created the world.

One of the answers is that *yetsias Mitzrayim* teaches us a certain additional aspect about HaShem we must believe in as part of the Mitzvah of *Emuna*. Creation shows that HaShem created the world, but it does not demonstrate that He remained involved in the world after He created it. One may claim that even though He did create the world, after that, He refrained from any further involvement and left the world to its own devices. However, *yetsias Mitzrayim* does indeed demonstrate that HaShem continues to be intimately involved in the world. This is the idea of Divine Providence, whereby HaShem maintains a constant interest and involvement in the world. Accordingly, when instructing us to believe in HaShem, the Torah chose to associate this with the fact that He took us out of *Mitzrayim* to teach us that it is not enough to merely believe that HaShem exists, and that he created the world. One must also acknowledge that He is constantly involved in the world.

With this explanation, we can also understand why *yetsias Mitzrayim* is so important that we start counting the months from the date when it began. Counting the days from Shabbos reminds us of the act of Creation, however counting the months from Nissan, reminds us of Divine Providence.

One still may ask, why is it so necessary to constantly remind a believing Jew that HaShem took us his nation out of *Mitzrayim* – he already believes it, so how do the constant reminders help? The answer is that is very easy to intellectually know something, but to internalize it is a far more difficult prospect. Rav Yisrael Salanter *zt”l*, the initiator of the study of *mussar*, taught that one of the most effective ways of internalizing a concept is by constantly repeating it, contemplating its meaning whilst doing so. It seems that the Torah prescribed numerous reminders of *yetsias Mitzrayim* to ensure that we remain constantly aware of it, and its ramifications.

May we all merit to internalize the lessons of *Parshas HaChodesh* and see the Hand of HaShem in our lives.