

D'var Torah for Parshiot Vayakhel-Pedudei

By Samuel Shvartsman, 7th Grade

Many mitzvot are written in the Torah in a very terse style. But the main mitzva topic in the last half of the book of Shmot is discussed in a very wordy style. This week's parshiot, the last two parshiot in the book of Shmot (Exodus), VaYakhel and Pekudei conclude a series of five parshiot whose primary topic is the "Mishkan" or Tabernacle. To introduce his theory about this anomaly, Rabbeinu Bachya, the great 12th century scholar, quotes the following verse from Bamidbar (8:19) that discusses the appointment of the Levites to guard access to the "Mishkan":

וְאֶתְנַהֵ אֶת הַלְוִיִּם נְתַנִּים | לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹבֵד אֶת עֲבֹדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּלְכַפֵּר עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶף בְּגֹשֶׁת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ:

"I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to perform the service for the children of Israel in the Tent of Meeting and to atone on behalf of the children of Israel, so that the children of Israel will not be afflicted with plague when the children of Israel approach the Sanctuary."

How can we understand the repetition of the phrase "the children of Israel" 5 times! The Torah could have written the words "they" or "them" the last four times!

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that both these exceptional repetitions are because of God's love for us. Saying "children of Israel" 5 times shows God's love for us because when people say someone's name more than once it means they love that person. Including in the Torah 5 parshiot that discuss the "Mishkan" also shows God's love for us, Rabbeinu Bachya says. How? The Hebrew root שִׁכַן (sh/k/n) means to dwell. A שָׁכֵן (shakhen) is a neighbor. The מִשְׁכָּן (Mishkan) is the building built whose specifications allow God to do things there that let us know that He is with us. God wants us to know that He loves us, and wants to be with us. Why is that?

Knowing that God loves us can affect us in a many wonderful ways. Knowing that all powerful and all-knowing God also loves us helps us be more confident in life and makes it easier to meet all of the challenges that life gives us.

Knowing that God loves us makes it easier to love God back. Loving God and having a relationship with him is one of the mitzvot in the Torah, and at first thought, this might seem very strange. How can we be expected to love someone that we can't even see? Telling us that God loves us makes our loving him much easier to do.

There is a blessing in the siddur right before "Shma" called "Ahava Raba" which is all about God's great love for us, and how we therefore ask him to help us learn torah, and give us peace. The siddur commentaries explain that it is placed right before Shma, which contains the mitzva to love God, because knowing about God's love for us makes it easier to do the mitzvah of "Ahavat Hashem" (loving God).

As we complete listening to the 5 "Mishkan" parshiot, we have a chance to change a possibly boring experience to a joyful one, if we remember the reason for all the repetition.