Febuary 25, 2022 Volume 12 Issue 16

פרשת ויקהל
Parshat Vayakhel

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Rabbi Avi Hochman
Shoshana Weinstock ('24)
Ben Cohen ('23)
Josh Haik ('24)
Orly Dimont ('23)

Go Big, Not Just Go Home

Rabbi Avi Hochman

Our parsha opens up with the following:

ויקהל משה את כל עדת בני ישראל

"And Moshe gathered together the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael…" (Shmot 35:1)

However, when Moshe finishes talking to Bnei Yisrael, the Torah tells us:

ויצאו כל עדת בני ישראל מלפני משה

"And the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael left from Moshe" (Shmot 35:20).

Is it not obvious? Could we not deduce that after Moshe finishes speaking to Bnei Yisrael that they leave his presence? If the Torah starts with Moshe speaking to Bnei Yisrael and then they leave, it would not be preposterous to assume that they left from Moshe's presence! After all, he was talking to them, and then he was finished. Of course they left and went home!

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, in his sefer Lev Eliyahu, shares what I think is a life-altering understanding of these seemingly extra words. He explains that when Bnei Yisrael left Moshe's presence, they were different. They gained from the experience of standing in front of Moshe, and were no longer the same as when they first came to Moshe. Being in the presence of Moshe had such a strong impact upon them, that everyone could tell from their actions and mannerisms that they had just been in Moshe's presence.

There are many experiences that we encounter on a daily basis that impact us in many ways. They change how we talk, what we eat, how we dress, how we spend our money, and how we live our lives.

For this reason, when a person leaves the Kotel or after closing the Aron Kodesh, they walk backwards. They want to retain the impact of the experience that just took place. The Torah is teaching us that whenever we are involved in an event, it should be noticeable from our deeds and traits where we have been. When we learn Torah, it should be obvious from how we behave outside of that Torah environment that the Torah has made an impact upon us.

Learning Torah should be incorporated into our very selves and should impact and refine our *middot*. The Torah

teaches us how to interact with others in the world, how to control our animalistic desires, how to learn to be satisfied and not jealous of others, and so much more.

If this is true about Torah, then it is certainly true about other events that take place in our lives. Whether it be Color War, an AIPAC Policy Conference, Basketball Tournament, a Shabbaton, a summer program, a Tanach class, or even a family dinner – we can never make the mistake of thinking that what we learn and experience has no effect on our lives. Our challenge is to be able to take from these experiences and apply them to our daily lives. Through our actions and behavior, these events should shape who we are and who we want to become.

Godly Gathering

Shoshana Weinstock '24

How do you remotivate a discouraged nation? How do you put the pieces of a broken nation back together again? This was the challenge Moshe faced in this week's parsha.

The key word here is "*vayakhel,*" – "and Moshe gathered" (Shmot 35:1). A *kehillah* is a group of people assembled for a given purpose, which can be positive or negative. The word *vayakhel* that appears at the beginning of this week's parsha as the beginning of the solution also appeared in last week's parsha as the start of the problem. The difference between the two kinds of *kehillah* is that one results in order and the other in chaos.

Coming down the mountain to see the golden calf, Moshe saw the people running wild and out of control. The verb פרע, similar to the verb פרא, means loose or unrestrained. There is a *kehillah* that is disciplined, task-oriented, and purposeful, and there is a *kehillah* that is a mob. People in crowds lose their sense of self-restraint and get carried along in a wave of emotion. Normal thought becomes ignored by the more natural instincts or feelings of the group. There have been famous studies of this. Parshat Vayakhel is Moshe's response to the chaos of the crowd that gathered around Aharon and made the golden calf. He doesn't oppose the people like he did at first; instead, he uses the motivation that drove them in the first place to make the calf. They wanted to create something that would be a sign that Hashem was among them.

Moshe appeals to the same sense of generosity that made them offer up their gold for the *egel hazahav*. The difference is that in donating to the Mishkan, they are now serving Hashem, not their own spontaneous urges or needs. Moshe asks the Jewish people to make voluntary contributions to the construction of the Mishkan. They are so generous and excited to give to this cause that Moshe has to tell them to stop.

Moshe gets the people to build something together in order to create a bond among them so they act for the common good. He gets them to undertake a task that they can only achieve together and that is impossible to be done alone. You can turn opposing groups into a single cohesive group if they are faced with a shared challenge to achieve together, a challenge that none can do alone.

We should all strive to develop better connections with our peers in order to form one cohesive block of students who are non severable in any situation we are placed in.

Bounce Back

Ben Cohen ('23)

In this week's parsha, Vayakhel, the Mishkan is built and the various instruments in the Mishkan are discussed, such as the aron, the shulchan, the menorah, the copper altar, and the silver altar. All of these vessels were designed and forged by Betzalel and Oholiav. Each holy item in the Mishkan was created with the best of the Jews' own gold and silver, wool and goat hair, herbs and expensive stones. The Jews brought so much of their own riches that the builders told Moshe:

מַרְבִּים הָעָם לְהָבִיא מִדֵּי הָעֲבֹדָה לַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר
צִוָּה ה' לַעֲשֹׂת אֹתָהּ

"The people brought much more than enough for the service of the work which Hashem commanded to make" (Shmot 36:5).

The Jews are so excited and dedicated to serving God that it took Moshe himself to tell them that they couldn't bring any more. Even before the Jews brought Betzalel and Oholiav their wealth, Betzalel and Oholiav had already started preparing for their work, according to the Ohr HaChaim (Shmot 36:1). So, not only was the common person vigorously building God's temple, but the leaders were leading as excellent examples.

How can these Jews that just (last week's parsha) created the golden calf be so dedicated to creating the golden menorah? How can the Jews who God wanted to destroy now live amidst His presence?

The fact that the Jews were able to turn their lives around from the deepest levels of immorality to full willingness to serve God in such a short time shows that no matter

how low we might be, it is always possible to turn our lives around. Hopefully we will never reach the level of the golden calf but even if we do, Vayakhel shows us we can always come back, stronger than ever before.

Be a Tzadik

Josh Haik ('24)

In this week's parsha, Vayakhel, we read about Moshe giving Bnei Yisrael the commandment of keeping Shabbat and blueprints for all the parts of the Mishkan. Alongside this, we also read Parshat Shekalim, one of the four special parshiyot that are each read once during the Jewish year. Shekalim depicts Hashem's call for a census of all the Jews; they each had to bring *machatzit hashekel* (half a shekel). Now if you think about it, this all seems like a waste of time. We've been taught since we were little that Hashem knows everything, so obviously He must know how many Jews there are. Moreover, if He knows how many Jews there are, why would He waste everyone's day by making them wait to give their *machatzit hashekel*?

There are multiple answers to this question. One approach is that Hashem did this to show how much He loves us. When you have something precious like a collection of antiques, you count it. The more you have, the more valuable that collection is to you and the more you want to protect it. Hashem knows the number of the Jewish people, but He didn't count us for Him, He did it for us. He wanted us to see how much we mean to Him, how each and every one of us makes a difference in the value of the Jewish people. But, in a collection of antiques, if one of them is broken the value of the collection goes down. So too in the Jewish nation. If one of us is broken, the value of our people goes down. If one decides not to carry out one of Hashem's mitzvot, then it affects all of us, it affects our value. The more valuable we are to Hashem, the more He wants to protect us. However, the more our nation breaks, the more Hashem has to give us a reminder to get back in place and fix ourselves.

One additional explanation: We are all counted as *machatzit hashekel*. When you consider the Hebrew letters of *machatzit (mem, chet, tzadi, yud, taf)*, you notice that the middle letter is a tzadi; this tzadi stands for the word *tzadik*. The Vilna Gaon writes that anyone who surrounds themselves with tzadikim merits to enjoy life. Now if we take the two letters immediately on either side of the *tzadi (chet and yud)*, it spells out the word "*chai*," which means life. But that's not all! The two letters furthest away from the tzadi (mem and taf) spell out the word "*meit*" (death). This implies that being surrounded by tzadikim is equivalent to having a good life, while surrounding yourself with people who aren't so good is equivalent to death.
Yes, this may seem like a stretch, but there is a valuable lesson to learn from here.

This idea of surrounding yourself with the right group of people has been around for thousands of years and it can be seen here. Hashem is pushing us to surround ourselves with the right people so we can grow, live, and thrive. The counting of the *machatzit hashekel* is right after the act of *cheit haegel*, where the Jews made a golden calf to worship. The people who suggested this idea were called the "Erev Rav" – a group of Egyptians who left with the Jews from Egypt because they were scared of Hashem and of dying. Moshe didn't necessarily ask permission from Hashem to bring these people along, and there ended up being consequences to their presence amongst the Jewish people. This group influenced the Jews to go against Hashem, and it cost the Jews the first set of *luchot* and almost cost them their lives and future generations to come. Hashem was going to wipe out the Jewish nation because they were influenced by the wrong crowd.

There are two lessons to be learned from this parsha. First, that each of us is valuable to Hashem and that we each make a difference to a collective whole. If one of us faces hardship, we should strive to influence them back to a path of righteousness. Second, we should all strive to be the positive influence that others seek to surround themselves with.

Strong Bond

Orly Dimont ('23)

In Parshat Vayakhel the instructions for the Mishkan are given to the Jews. This parsha repeats a lot from Parshiyot Terumah and Tetzavah but has slight differences that are worth examining. One difference is the order in which the Jews build. In the previous parshiyot, Hashem commanded the Jews to build the structure, then the *keilim*, and after, separately, the ketoret/incense altar. In this parsha, however, we see the Jews building the *keilim*, including the ketoret and then the outside structure.

Why is the ketoret-altar singled out? Although every *kli* in the Mishkan is holy in its own way, the ketoret stands out particularly because of the way we connect to Hashem through it. A ketoret offering sends a cloud of aromatic smoke up to *shamayim* directly to Hashem. On Yom Kippur it is brought in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* and the aromatic cloud is met by the presence of Hashem that rests on the aron. Hashem's presence is represented by a cloud as well, and this signifies the holiness of the

cloud from the ketoret. Hashem uses a cloud to show His presence as He did on Har Sinai to connect with the people. This answer can help us understand why the Jews build the Mishkan out of order. Hashem wanted the structure built first so that He could dwell amongst the people, but the Jews wanted to build the *keilim* first so that they could meet Hashem in *shamayim*.

While it was important to Hashem to be able to be with Jews on their level, the Jews built the Mishkan in this order to show that being able to serve Hashem was the most important aspect to them. The Jewish people wanted to make sure to have everything ready for Hashem's house so that when it was time for Him to dwell there, it would be furnished and beautiful. This parsha is a response to Hashem's desire to be with the Jews in the previous parshiyot. In the previous parsha, Hashem is showing His love for us by wanting to be among the Jews in a physical way, but in this parsha the Jews show that the relationship isn't one sided; the Jews' number one priority is to serve Hashem.

MESHUGANA MEMES



Staff

Editor-in-Chief
ATARA KEEHN (' 23)

Design Directors
ABBY ROSENTHAL (' 23)
BRIANNA SHAMAH (' 23)

Editors
SHOSHANA STADLAN (' 22)
EMMA SCHENKER (' 22)
PENINA KAHANE (' 22)
REBECCA ADLER (' 23)
HANNAH SHAPIRO (' 23)
ZOHARA LAM (' 23)
JUDAH FROLICH (' 23)
HILA BLANKA (' 23)

Monthly Contributors
AYDEN FRANK (' 23)
LIZI BUGAY (' 22)
AVICHAI SHEKTHER (' 22)
NAOMI REICHENBERG (' 22)
CHANA SCHANDELSON (' 22)
ARIELLA GREENBERG (' 22)
SHUEY SILKIN (' 23)
ORLY DIMONT (' 23)
HANNAH MARKOVICH (' 24)
ZACHY DENNIS (' 23)
ELISHA MARCUS (' 23)
ZEV HIRSCH (' 23)

Faculty Advisor
RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

Developers
NAVA SHEKTHER (' 24)
RIVKA REICH (' 24)

A KYHS PARSHA PUBLICATION

ravh@yeshivahs.org