



ישיבת הר עציון

Yeshivat Har Etzion – Israel Koschitzky VBM Parsha Digest Year II, #27 Parashiyot Vayakhel-Pekudei - HaChodesh 5780

Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

Both in Parashat Ki Tisa and in Parashat Vayakhel, the laws of Shabbat are juxtaposed to the labor involved in the Mishkan.... Just as the Mishkan is a “Sanctuary in space,” so Shabbat is a “Sanctuary in time.”....

However, the world comprises more than just these two dimensions, as a third dimension is added to these – man. The human dimension has its sanctuary, too, and it is the heart: “In my heart I shall build a Sanctuary.” A person who wishes to attain sanctity and to grow in sanctity, must work first and foremost on his heart. “Purify our hearts to serve You in truth,” we ask; “Create me a pure heart, O God.”...

The Gemara (Berakhot 61b), describing the qualities of various organs, states: “The heart understands” (lev mevin). Understanding is deeper than wisdom. A person who is wise comprehends what he is taught; a person with understanding... is able to read between the lines and to gain insight that goes beyond the information given. This is a most profound concept: Although wisdom may be attained through the intellect, a person who aspires to reach a higher level of sanctity and connection with God will not be able to create this connection through the intellect alone; he needs the understanding of the heart. To be a person whose heart is in the right place, a heart that is pure and also a heart that is warm – this is “understanding of the heart.”

Man’s sanctuary is indeed in his heart. Without detracting from the importance and status of knowledge and intellect, we must not forget: “God seeks the intention of the heart” (Sanhedrin 106b). -Harav Baruch Gigi



Parashiyot Vayakhel-Pekudei The Mishkan and the Vessels

Based on a Sichah by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/mishkan-and-vessels>

Construction of the Vessels Before Construction of the Mishkan

The Torah describes the great wisdom of Betzalel, as expressed in his abilities both in planning and in execution (see Shemot 35:30-35). Chazal describe another aspect of Betzalel’s wisdom: “Betzalel was so named because of his wisdom. When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe, ‘Go, say to Betzalel: Make me a Mishkan, an ark, and vessels,’ Moshe went to him and said, ‘Make an ark, and vessels, and a Mishkan.’ Betzalel then said to him, ‘Moshe, our teacher – the general rule is that a person builds a house, and only afterwards does he bring vessels into it. Why, then, do you say: Make an ark, and vessels, and a Mishkan? If I make the vessels first, where will I put them? Perhaps God told you: Make a Mishkan, an ark, and vessels?’ Upon which Moshe declared, ‘Perhaps you were in the shadow of God [be-tzel E-I], and you knew!’ (Berakhot 55a)

Why, in fact, did Moshe command Betzalel first to build the vessels and only afterwards the Mishkan? This question has 2 components. First, in terms of simple logic, it is clear that Betzalel is correct. Would a person first buy furniture and only then look for a home in which to put it?

Second, even if Moshe believed, for whatever reason, that it would be better first to build the vessels, how could he change the order on his own initiative, after God had told him first to build the Mishkan? Although the gemara in Shabbat (87a) lists 3 occasions

when Moshe indeed took the initiative and God afterwards approved what he had done, the gemara offers convincing arguments in favor of Moshe's decision in each instance. Let us examine whether an equally compelling explanation is to be found in our case.

Practical Efficiency and Theoretical Importance

To gain a better understanding of Moshe's reversal of the order of the work-plan, let us consider what Ramban writes in Parashat Teruma (Shemot 25:2): "The main point of the Mishkan is the resting place for the Divine Presence – i.e. the ark, as it is written, 'And I will meet with you there, and I will speak with you from above the covering...' Therefore, the ark and its cover are mentioned here first, for this is the most important vessel. It is followed by the table and the menorah, which are also vessels, and they point to the Mishkan, which is made for their sake. But in Parashat Vayakhel, Moshe mentions first the Mishkan, its tent and its covering, and so Betzalel made them, since it is proper that the Mishkan be made first."

Ramban's understanding of the relationship between God's command and Moshe's instruction is the opposite of that of the gemara. Nevertheless, he offers insight into the significance of mentioning the Mishkan or the vessels first.

The vessels, and especially the ark, are the ultimate purpose for which the Mishkan is built. The Mishkan is built in order to create a place in which the Divine Presence can dwell and where God can meet with Bnei Yisrael. This purpose is achieved by means of the ark and its cover.

In practical terms, it makes sense to build first the Mishkan and only afterwards the vessels. But in terms of real importance and the ultimate aim, the ark and the other vessels take priority.

Practical Torah Study Combined with Vision

We can now answer the question we posed at the outset. God commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan and thereafter the vessels, because in terms of practical operations, this is the proper order.

Moshe – a man of vision – perceives the lofty purpose of building the Mishkan, and in order to convey the ultimate aim and purpose of all the work that Betzalel is going to oversee, he first speaks to him of the climax of the project: the creation of the wondrous vessel by means of which direct contact will be maintained between Am Yisrael and God. Only afterwards does he speak of the other parts of the Mishkan.

Betzalel, on the other hand, is a man of action. He immediately understands that in practical terms, the order must be first the house and afterwards the furniture.

The midrash teaches: "There were several able people there, and they came to Moshe, finding themselves unable to set up the Mishkan.... Each took up his work, and they came to Moshe, saying: 'Here are the planks; here are the hinges.' When Moshe saw them, the Divine spirit rested upon him and he set up the Mishkan." (Shemot Rabba 52:4)

The midrash seems to be emphasizing that in order to set up the Mishkan, it is not sufficient to have talented, able people who carry out their work with perfect precision. There has to be a leader with vision who breathes spirit into the materials, transforming them into a Mishkan.

If this is true of a construction of wood and stone, how much more so does it apply to the building up of a person and the molding of his personality.

As scholars sitting in the beit midrash, we are engaged primarily in studying the substance of Torah from different angles and accumulating skills and experience in analyzing and clarifying sugyot in the Gemara. This study is a necessary precondition in order to grow in Torah and in fear of Heaven – but it is not sufficient. In order to build a real Torah personality, strong practical skills are not enough. We must also be people of vision, having before us at all times the aspiration of being filled and saturated with the fear of Heaven that is our ultimate purpose.

Translated by Kaeren Fish



Parashat Vayakhel

The Shabbat of Sinai and the Shabbat of the Mishkan

By Prof. Yonatan Grossman

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shabbat-sinai-and-shabbat-mishkan>

We shall focus on the first 3 verses of the parasha, regarding the observance of Shabbat. Whereas God, in His presentation to Moshe, inserted a discussion of Shabbat at the very end of the instructions vis-à-vis the mishkan (Shemot 31:12-17), Moshe opens his set of guidelines regarding the mishkan with the mitzva of Shabbat.

For two reasons, this switch should come as no surprise:

A. On the literary level, the verses dealing with Shabbat serve to return the narrative to the flow of events which had been disrupted by the golden calf. The mitzva of Shabbat reminds the reader of God's discussion of Shabbat which occurred just prior to the sin of the golden calf, thus restoring the narrative flow.

B. On the logical level, it made sense for God to leave this detail until the end – first He described the essence of the task (building the mishkan and its utensils), and only then did He relate to technical details, such as who is to build it and when. Moshe, on the other hand, was giving the people practical instructions in order to carry out this major operation. Thus, he begins his remarks with the basic limitations on the construction, when the work may be performed and when not.

Although these answers may suffice to resolve the change of order, they do not explain the need for this lengthy discussion of Shabbat. Granted, God and Moshe need to warn the workers that the construction of the mishkan would not override the prohibitions of Shabbat. But this reminder could have been expressed in just a few words. Why does the Torah invest so much text to the laws of Shabbat observance? Although the people had already been instructed with regard to Shabbat observance both in Midbar Sin (in the context of the manna) and again at Mt. Sinai (in the fourth of the Ten Commandments), God spends 6 verses telling Moshe about Shabbat at the conclusion of His remarks regarding the construction of the mishkan. Why?

Upon closely examining the commandment of Shabbat presented in conjunction with the mishkan, we discover new dimensions of Shabbat, qualities essentially linked to the function and conceptual underpinnings of the mishkan. In order to fully appreciate the unique contribution of this account of the mitzva of Shabbat, let us recapitulate the 6 mentions of Shabbat in the Book of Shemot, pointing out the uniqueness of each:

1. In Midbar Sin, the Jews were instructed not to collect manna on Shabbat. Instead, they were to stay at home and take advantage of the double portion given on Friday.

2. In the Ten Commandments, the mitzva of Shabbat appears in a clear, chiastic structure, which enables the reader to easily detect the character and function of Shabbat (20:8-11):

A. Remember the Shabbat day and keep it holy.

B. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of Hashem your God

C. You shall not do any work – you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements.

B'. For in six days God made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day.

A'. Therefore, God blessed the Shabbat day and sanctified it.

One must sanctify the day of Shabbat, just as his Creator did (A). This sanctification is effectuated by halting work on the seventh day, following the pattern established by the Almighty at creation (B). The centerpiece of the commandment transmits the fundamental precept of Shabbat – that no labor be performed, neither by the individual himself nor by those who generally work for him.

Thus, this structure of the Fourth Commandment clearly associates the individual's observance of Shabbat with that of the Almighty. At Mt. Sinai, God stresses man's obligation to follow God's lead and sanctify the day of Shabbat.

3-4. The Torah refers to the mitzva of Shabbat towards the end of Parashat Mishpatim (23:12) and, correspondingly, in the renewal of the covenant following the sin of the golden calf (in Parashat Ki-Tisa, ch. 34). However, in this context a totally different reason for the mitzva appears: "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and donkey may rest, and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed." Here, Shabbat is characterized by the societal interest in allowing the workers an opportunity to rest. Employers are bidden to allow their employees a weekly vacation. (Note that this reason recurs in Moshe's recounting of the Ten Commandments in Sefer Devarim.)

5-6. The 2 final references to the mitzva of Shabbat appear in the context of the building of the mishkan, as we noted above. Here, 2 new, significant elements appear: "He who desecrates it shall be put to death; whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin" (31:14). For the first time, we encounter a punishment for the violation of Shabbat – "karet." Secondly, we discover in these verses the concept of "chillul," desecration. One who fails to observe the Shabbat has not only VIOLATED a commandment,

but he has DESECRATED the Shabbat. The Shabbat is to be viewed as a sacred entity, and thus neglect of its laws result in a desecration of its sacred quality. This concept – the inherent sanctity of Shabbat – appears for the first time in this context, in association with the mishkan. Although the Ten Commandments require the individual to “sanctify the Shabbat,” that relates to the person’s refraining from work. Here, one who neglects Shabbat not only fails to sanctify the day, he desecrates and profanes it.

The unique contribution of this parasha to our understanding of Shabbat becomes clearer upon a closer literary analysis of God’s presentation of the mitzva to Moshe, which Moshe himself paraphrases in his own presentation to the people:

A. Nevertheless, you must keep My Shabbatot

B. for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages

C. that you may know that I, God, have sanctified you.

D. You shall keep the Shabbat, for it is holy for you.

E. He who desecrates it shall be put to death; whoever does work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his kin.

F. Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a Shabbat of complete rest, holy to God;

E’. whoever does work on the Shabbat day shall be put to death.

D’. The Israelite people shall keep the Shabbat,

C’. observing the Shabbat throughout the ages as a covenant for all time.

B’. It shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel,

A’. for in six days God made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed.

Here, too, the chiasmic structure cannot be overlooked. The central feature (F) stresses the basic command, that one must refrain from work on the seventh day. Were the final verse (A’) placed immediately following this basic command, then this treatment of Shabbat would parallel that of the Ten Commandments. However, this parasha features several other elements in between: the death penalty for violators (E), emphasis on the requirement to observe (D), the unique relationship between the Almighty and Bnei Yisrael as expressed by the institution of Shabbat (“I have sanctified you;” “observing the Shabbat as a covenant” – C) and the quality of Shabbat as an “ot,” an eternal sign between God and His people (B). Thus, although the basic command (F), as well as both the opening and ending (A), correspond to the commandment of Shabbat at Mt. Sinai, this framework is most likely intended to underscore the added information contained here, beyond that which was presented at Sinai.

There are 2 significant differences between the halves of the parasha (A-E; E’-A’). Firstly, whereas in the first half God refers to the nation in second person, in the second half the third person form is employed. Thus while we find “for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages” in the first half, we find in the second half, “it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel.” Similarly, while the first half orders the people directly, “You shall keep the Shabbat,” the second half states, “The Israelite people shall keep the Shabbat,” and so on.

This distinction between the two halves of the parasha may very well relate to another clear difference between them: the first section consistently focuses on the element of “kedusha” (sanctity) as the underlying motif of Shabbat, a component omitted from the second half. The kedusha of Shabbat, as described by the first half of the parasha, is manifest in 3 ways: A. God sanctifies Bnei Yisrael: “for I am Hashem Who sanctified you.” B. Bnei Yisrael sanctify the Shabbat: “You shall keep the Shabbat, for it is holy for you.” C. God Himself sanctifies the Shabbat: “a Shabbat of complete rest, holy to God.”

Thus, Shabbat is holy both for God and the Jewish people, and, consequently, Bnei Yisrael become a sacred people in the eyes of God. In other words, God, in order to sanctify the people, presents them with His unique gift, an item of ultimate sanctity to Him. The moment they, too, sanctify the Shabbat, they become sacred before the One Who had sanctified the Shabbat in the first place – God. Through the Shabbat, which is sanctified to both God and Bnei Yisrael, Bnei Yisrael become a holy nation before the Almighty.

In Parashat Vayakhel, as Moshe recounts God’s command regarding the Shabbat, he includes both elements of the sanctification of the Shabbat: “On 6 days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a Shabbat of complete rest to God; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death” (35:2). The seventh day will be “holy for you,” for it is a “day of complete rest to God.” Based on the lengthier commandment he heard from God, Moshe incorporates both sources of the sanctity of Shabbat to the people.

This “romantic” quality of Shabbat uniting God and Israel, captured by Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz’s “Lekha Dodi” prayer, had not appeared earlier in Chumash. The previous references to Shabbat involve the individual’s cessation of work on the seventh day, thereby testifying to God’s having brought into existence the entirety of creation. Here, for the first time, Bnei Yisrael stand before the

Almighty and are elevated to a unique stature of “kedusha.”

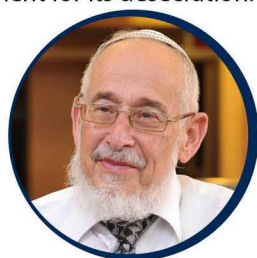
The second half of the parasha in Ki-Tisa seems to reflect the earlier aspect of Shabbat, the one expressed by the Ten Commandments. In this sense, Shabbat involves not Bnei Yisrael’s position vis-à-vis the Almighty, but rather, “For in six days God made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed.” Thus, God’s discussion of Shabbat, with which He concludes His guidelines regarding the mishkan, combines the 2 different functions of Shabbat – the testimony to God’s having created the world, and the more “intimate” quality of Shabbat – the unique, sacred relationship between the Almighty and His people.

For this reason, specifically in the first half of this section God refers to the nation in second person, as if He converses, so-to-speak, with Bnei Yisrael. In the first half, the people stand directly before the Almighty as they become sanctified to Him. In the second half, by contrast, Bnei Yisrael are referred to in third person. Here they stand not before God, but before creation, testifying to its having emerged by the divine word.

Since the element of kedusha emerges here as a central theme of Shabbat for the first time, it now becomes clear why the concept of “desecration” of Shabbat first appears in this presentation of Shabbat. One who violates the Shabbat undermines its sacred quality, and he is guilty of not only violating God’s commandment but of desecrating His holy day.

The final issue to be addressed is why does this concept of the sanctity of Shabbat first appear here, in the context of the construction of the mishkan? It would seem that the answer lies in another form of kedusha, that of the mishkan itself. After the people learn of the proverbial “House of God,” after hearing about the mishkan, which represents the concept of ontological sanctity of place, they are now prepared to appreciate the concept of sanctity of time. If there can be a specific location that is elevated to a superior level of kedusha, then there can also exist one timeframe exalted over other times. God thus introduces the concept of the sanctity of Shabbat, a status capable of desecration, whose violators are thus liable for the punishment of “karet.”

When delineating the specific forbidden activities that warrant capital punishment on Shabbat, Chazal based themselves on this association between the mishkan and Shabbat. The concept of “chillul” is derived specifically from here, and consequently, it is precisely here that one can speak of capital punishment. Indeed, the sanctity of Shabbat, the prominent theme in this context, warrants severe punishment for its desecration.



Haftara for Parashat HaChodesh

(Yechezkel 45:17-46:18)

By Rav Yehuda Shaviv zt”l

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/parashat-ha-chodesh-yechezkel-4517-4618>

This Shabbat we read the final of the “four parshiyot,” the section from Parashat Bo (Shemot 12:1-20) dealing with the laws of the Paschal sacrifice. Our haftara for this Shabbat comes from the prophecy of Yechezkel, as instituted by Chazal (Masekhet Megilla 30a). Although different customs exist regarding where precisely to begin and end the haftara (see Encyclopedia Talmudit, “arba parshiyot”), all agree on the heart of the haftara, which speaks of the festival sacrifices.

I. New Every Year

Study of the laws relevant to the korban Pesach before the onset of the festival clearly serves as preparation for the holiday. If Bnei Yisrael heard this parasha before the very first Pesach, then the annual reading reminds us of the various instructions and guidelines. However, neither the special maftir reading nor the haftara relate to the korban Pesach of future generations. The verses in Parashat Bo involve only the special sacrifice offered in Egypt on the eve of the Exodus. Although there is some overlap between the laws relevant to this sacrifice and those regarding the korban Pesach in the years thereafter (see Mishna, Pesachim 9:5), there are many differences. Likewise, the portion selected for the haftara deals with the korban Pesach of the Messianic era, and there are many differences between the laws that appear in Yechezkel and those familiar to us from halakha (see Chazon Hamikra vol. 2, pp. 223-9).

It turns out, then, that the maftir and haftara readings this Shabbat function more as means for emotional preparation than practical, technical preparation. Perhaps precisely these differences between the three categories of Pesach - in Egypt, in future generations, and in the Messianic era - teach us that there is room for some level of innovation and the infusion of a unique quality into the observance of Pesach every year. The introduction of an innovative element arouses the children’s curiosity and brings them to ask,

“Why is this night different?” Indeed, the Rambam writes (Hilkhos Chametz U-Matza 7:3), “One must do something different on this night in order that the children see and ask and say, ‘Why is this night different from all other nights?’ until he answers them and tells them that such-and-such occurred.”

II. The Month of the Beginning of the Redemption

The maftir reading is entitled, “ha-chodesh,” on account of its opening phrase: “This month [ha-chodesh] is for you the first of all months.” This verse marks the first mitzva issued to Bnei Yisrael as a nation – the mitzva of declaring the new month according to the sighting of the new moon. (See the well-known comments of Rabbi Yitzchak, cited in Rashi’s opening remarks to his commentary on Chumash.) Additionally, the verse informs Bnei Yisrael that Nissan is to be considered the first month of the year. If their freedom from Egyptian bondage served to facilitate their entry into the service of God and the observance of His commandments, then the beginning of that entry occurred still in Egypt, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, when they received this very first mitzva.

And if their redemption meant ultimately their return to “the level of their forefathers” as the Ramban establishes in his introduction to Sefer Shemot, then this redemption reached its culmination when “they made the Mishkan and the Almighty returned and had His Shekhina reside among them” (Ramban, *ibid.*). When did this take place? The Torah tells us towards the very end of Sefer Shemot (40:1): “On the first day of the first month.” Thus, it turns out that the redemption first began unfolding on Rosh Chodesh Nissan in Egypt, and its final actualization occurred precisely one year later – on Rosh Chodesh Nissan – in the wilderness. The haftara then comes and informs us that regarding the final redemption, too, the process will begin on Rosh Chodesh Nissan: “On the first day of the first month, you shall take a bull of the herd and you shall cleanse the sanctuary” (45:18).

The prophet informs us further of the stature afforded to Rosh Chodesh, as the inner gate of the sanctuary was opened on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh (48:1), “The common people shall worship before God on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh at the entrance of that gate” (46:3).

III. The Mikdash: The Apex of Redemption

While the korban Pesach earns the central focus of the maftir reading, it appears in but one verse in the haftara. The haftara deals primarily with the dedication of the future Beit Hamikdash (for Yechezkel, that meant the second Mikdash; for us, the third), which begins with the sacrifices on the first of Nissan, continues with sacrifices on the seventh of the month, and proceeds to the korban Pesach and sacrifices throughout the festival and those on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh.

This prophecy may have been selected as the haftara for Shabbat Ha-chodesh precisely to contrast this prophecy with the maftir reading – the beginning of the redemption as opposed to its culmination. The process began with the Paschal sacrifice in Egypt, and it concludes with the Mikdash and the service therein. This is exactly the picture that emerges from the listing of God’s acts of kindness that we recite in the Haggada (“Dayenu”). We begin with “hotzi’anu mi-Mitzrayim” – the Exodus from Egypt – and end with “bana lanu et Beit Ha-bechira” – the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

D. The Duration of the Redemption

In the Haggada we enumerate 15 acts of kindness that God performed for us, which are, in essence, 15 “stations” along the way to ultimate redemption. However, the transitions leading from one stage to the next do not necessarily occur over the course of the same time frame. Less than 2 months passed from Bnei Yisrael’s departure from Egypt until their receiving of the Torah, while they did not enter Eretz Yisrael until 40 years thereafter. Then, 440 years passed before the Bet Hamikdash was built!

Or, calculating a bit differently, the Mishkan’s inauguration occurred only 1 year after the Exodus. Said otherwise, in just 1 year Bnei Yisrael transformed from a group of downtrodden slaves, physically and emotionally subjugated and steeped in the impurity of Egypt, to God’s nation that merited the Torah and the Mishkan, which was filled with the Glory of God (end of Sefer Shemot). Yet, it took 480 years after the construction of the Mishkan until the Bet Hamikdash was built.

It would seem that the message that emerges is a twofold one:

1. We should never despair even in the grimmest situations, whereas major changes and transformations can occur ever so rapidly.
2. We may not grow impatient with a slow-moving process of redemption. As we have seen, the transition from one station to the next often extends over long period of time.

(Translated by David Silverberg)

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