Overview

**VAYAKHEL**

Moshe exhorts the Bnei Yisrael to keep Shabbos, and requests donations for the materials for the construction of the Mishkan (tent of meeting). He collects gold, silver, precious stones, animal skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the Menorah and for anointing. The princes of each of the twelve tribes bring the precious stones for the Kohen Gadol’s breastplate and ephod. Hashem appoints Betzalel and Oholiav as the master craftsmen for the building of the Mishkan and its vessels. The Bnei Yisrael contribute so much that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed to serve as the material for the Mishkan’s roof and door. Gold-covered boards set in silver bases were connected and formed the walls of the Mishkan. Betzalel made the Aron Hakodesh (Ark), which contained the Tablets of the Covenant, from wood that was covered with gold on the inside and outside. On the cover of the Ark were two small figures facing each other with wings arching over the Ark. The Menorah and the Shulchan, the table with the showbread, were also made of gold. Two altars were made: A smaller one for burning incense, made of wood overlaid with gold, and a larger altar for the purpose of sacrifices that was made of wood that was covered with copper.

**PEKUDEI**

The Book of Shemos comes to its conclusion with this Parsha. After finishing all the different parts, vessels and garments used in the Mishkan, Moshe gives a complete accounting and enumeration of all the contributions and of the various clothing and vessels which had been fashioned. The Bnei Yisrael bring their share of the contributions and vessels which had been fashioned. The mishkan is complete with every vessel in its place, a cloud moves away from the cloud, and its name is recorded. True, there would be a vehicle through which the Divine Presence would rest amongst them.

In their confusion, the Jews surmised they would need someone or something to replace Moshe; some vehicle to be the intermediary between them and Hashem. When Moshe failed to come down from the mountain they saw in the clouds a vision of his dead body being carried on a bier. In his confusion, the Jews surmised they would need someone or something to replace Moshe; some vehicle for the Divine Presence to rest amongst them.

In this assumption they were not far off the mark. But there’s another American folk saying: “Close only counts in horseshoes and hand-grenades.” Not being far from the mark can be as far as day is from night.

The purpose of the Mishkan was to atone for the making of the golden calf. And the underlying flaw evinced by the golden calf was the desire to be smarter than Hashem. The Jewish People had seen that Moshe had acted as an intermediary between them and Hashem. When Moshe failed to come down from the mountain they saw in the clouds a vision of his dead body being carried on a bier. In his confusion, the Jews surmised they would need someone or something to replace Moshe; some vehicle for the Divine Presence to rest amongst them.

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True, there would be a vehicle through which the Divine Presence would rest on the Jewish People, and its name was the Mishkan. However, the Mishkan could only be built according to the original Maker’s instructions. No one guaranteed way to increase sales of a product is to put a flash on the box saying “New!!! Improved!!!” Inevitably, the veracity of this claim is in inverse proportion to the number of exclamation marks which follow it.

We have an almost insatiable desire for “new.” Our society is founded on the self-evident premise that everything can and needs to be improved. There’s an old American folk saying: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

In this week’s Parsha, the words “As Hashem commanded Moshe” appear over and over again. Twenty-two times. At the end of every single detail of the Mishkan, “As Hashem commanded ... as Hashem commanded Moshe ... as Hashem commanded Moshe.” Why this seeming redundancy?

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improvements are possible on these instructions. And when we try to make improvements, we end up with a golden calf. When we try and modernize and pluralize we end up with a golden calf.

The word of Hashem is perfect. It restores the soul. It is like no man-made panacea. If we want Hashem’s presence to dwell in our lives, the only way is through following the Maker’s instructions— to the letter. Otherwise we end up with a golden calf.

It is for this reason that after each detail of the golden calf.

The essence of the Mishkan was that it was “as Hashem commanded Moshe.”

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It is for this reason that after each detail of the Mishkan the Torah says “as Hashem commanded Moshe.”

The essence of the Mishkan was that it was “as Hashem commanded Moshe” and not through the mistaken good intentions of man.

No Previous Experience Required

“And each person whose heart motivated him came.” (35:21)

Take a look at the really wealthy people in the world. What is it that they all have in common? Tremendous initiative. Initiative means not focusing on what you have now, but having the confidence to project what might be, and to act on it.

“And each person whose heart motivated him came.”

The workers who made the Mishkan needed to be motivated by their hearts because none of them had any previous experience in the skills necessary for building it, and there were no teachers to train them! They were the true pioneers. They were successful because they had the inner courage to come forth and volunteer to do whatever was needed. They didn’t think about their shortcomings. They projected their dreams. Just as it takes great initiative to become materially wealthy, so too it takes great initiative to become spiritually wealthy. Capitalize on those peak moments of inspiration to focus your spiritual goals higher and higher, and you will get help from above to lift you to the skies.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

“He should make the copper laver... from the mirrors of the legions...” (38:8)

When you look at someone else, what do you see? You notice all the character flaws that he himself tries so hard to conceal. When you look at someone else, think that you are looking in a mirror. Just as a mirror reveals to us our unsightly features, so too when we see character flaws in others, we should check for those same traits in ourselves. That’s what the saying means: “Who is wise? He who learns from every person (Avos).”

When the kohanim prepared for the service of Hashem in the Mishkan, they washed their hands and feet. On a mystical level, this cleansed them of any spiritual blemish, from any defect, bias or partiality. The laver in which they washed was made entirely of mirrors. This reminded the kohanim that they should check themselves for those character faults that they perceived in others. Because were they only to look at themselves, they would find it very hard to identify their own faults.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall II

“He should make the copper laver... from the mirrors of the legions...” (38:8)

In the courtyard of the Tabernacle stood a very large copper laver from which the kohanim washed their hands and feet before performing the service of the Mishkan. It was made exclusively from brightly polished sheets of copper that had been used by the Jewish women as mirrors to adorn themselves.

At first, Moshe was loath to accept the mirrors. Since they had been used to incite desire, he considered them unsuitable for such an elevated purpose. However Hashem instructed him to accept them. These mirrors were more beloved to Hashem than all the other gifts to the Mishkan, for through these mirrors the women of Israel had established multitudes — legions of Jewish souls in Egypt. When their husbands were exhausted from the back-breaking slave-labor, the women would go out to them, bring them food and drink, and feed them.

As they sat there, they would take out their mirrors and each one would look at herself, together with her husband, in the mirror. She would allure him with words, saying “Am I not more beautiful than you?”

This is what the Torah alludes to when it speaks of the “mirrors of the legions.”
**Heart of Stone**

One who aspires to purify himself spiritually is given help from above.

The period before Rosh Chodesh Nissan is especially favorable for purification. This is one of the reasons that we read Parshas Parah at this time of the year.

But there is a more basic reason: In the time of the Beis Hamikdash, it was on the 14th of Nissan that the Pesach sacrifice was brought by all the Jewish People.

Parshas Parah deals with the laws of purification that were needed to purify the Jewish People from contact with a dead body — a necessary preliminary to entering the Beis Hamikdash and bringing the Pesach sacrifice.

The Haftorah describes the time of Mashiach, when Hashem will “sprinkle purifying waters on the Bnei Yisrael” and remove from them all the impurities that have encrusted their souls.

“I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh instead.” (46:26)

Hashem’s mitzvos are our life blood. When we neglect them, our hearts freeze over, severed from their lifeline.

We become spiritually rigid. Our hearts atrophy, coarsen and eventually become as rigid as stone.

And because we then have made ourselves a heart of stone, we don’t realize that this is why we have so little faith. How can a heart of stone have faith? We don’t realize that our complaints against Hashem come from a rock chamber entombed in our chests.

Eventually it will be too late for a “bypass.” Hashem will come and give us a heart that is soft, that cries, that wants to hear the word of Hashem and beats in time to its Maker.

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**Sources:**

- We Have The Technology - Beis Halevi
- No Previous Experience Required - Ramban, Rabbi Yerucham Leovitz, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin
- Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall - Toldos Yaakov Yosef
- Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall II - Rashi

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**LOVE OF THE LAND**

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

**Giving Expression to Love**

When Moshe Rabbeinu was refused entry into Eretz Yisrael he complained to Hashem:

“The bones of Yosef shall enter the land and I shall not enter?”

“He who proudly admitted that this was his land shall be buried in it,” replied Hashem, “but he who did not admit that this was his land shall not be buried in it.”

Yosef did not deny his Hebrew origin when Potifar’s wife (Bereishis 39:14) derided him as a “Hebrew brought here to make fun of us.” He even went further in describing himself to the chief butler (Bereishis 40:15) as one who “had been stolen from the land of the Hebrews.”

But when the daughters of Yisro told their father that “an Egyptian man rescued us” (Shemos 2:19), Moshe made no effort to correct this false impression and stress his Hebrew origins.

Devarim Rabbah 2:8

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**What do you do with Torah Weekly?**

H. de Jong of Haarlem, The Netherlands, wrote:

What do I do with Torah weekly? First I take some quiet time in the morning in my office when I arrive early, and read your E-mail without disturbance. I think about it, try to figure out how it applies to the situation of my family and myself. Some explanations or stories get fixed somewhere in my background-memory. In the evening my wife, my children (four sons), and myself have dinner together and we speak about what everyone did that day and what we plan to do. Then, sometimes, one of the items I learned from you pops up in my mind, triggered by a situation or by something brought up, and I tell what I remember about it. Thank you for providing me and my family with a link to our roots.

E-mail what YOU do with Torah Weekly and we’ll share it with other readers. E-Mail should be addressed to whatIdo@ohr.israel.net