

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Vayakhel

#### *Not Fire Power, Not Brain Power*

***“Moses assembled the entire congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them: These are the things that Hashem has commanded, to do them.” (35:1)***

If wars are good for anything, it's this:

A war brings out in people what Londoners in the second world war called – ‘the Blitz Spirit.’ A spirit of shared hardship. Wars either bring out the worst in people – or the best. In the current war against Iran, we see the internecine strife in the Land of Israel - religious versus secular, Right versus Left - replaced by a spirit of unity and brotherhood (however brief this may be.)

But let us not delude ourselves: unity in itself has no over-arching value. Unity is only valuable if it leads to the strengthening of Torah and its values.

Our Sages teach: *Great is Peace, for it was placed in the portion of the Righteous; great is peace for it was not placed in the portion of the Evil. (Yalkut Nasso)*

When Moshe assembled the entire congregation of the Children of Israel in a unified gathering, the first thing he said to them was: *“These are the things that Hashem has commanded, to do them.”*

Unity and community only have value when they lead to doing the mitzvot – the Will of Hashem.

Let us hope and pray that the current unity in the Land of Israel will lead to a greater awareness that all our miraculous success, in this and all the wars that the State has fought, have nothing to do with our superior fire-power, or brain-power, but are because the God of Israel fights for His People – and we merit that protection in proportion to our fulfilling His Will.

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Parashat Vayakhel

Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts *Bnei Yisrael* to keep Shabbat, and requests donations for the materials for making the Mishkan. He collects gold, silver, precious stones, skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the Menorah and for anointing. The princes of each tribe bring the precious stones for the Kohen Gadol's breastplate and *ephod*. G-d appoints Betzalel and Oholiav as the master craftsmen. Bnei Yisrael contribute so many resources that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed for the Mishkan's roof and door. Gold-covered boards in silver bases were connected, forming the Mishkan's walls. Betzalel made the Holy Ark (which contained the Tablets) from wood covered with gold. On the Ark's cover were two figures - *keruvim* - facing each other. The Menorah and the table with the showbreads were also of gold. Two Altars were made: a small incense Altar of wood, overlaid with gold, and a larger Altar for sacrifices, made of wood covered with copper.

## Parashat Pekudei

The Book of Shemot concludes with this Torah portion. After finishing all the different parts, vessels and garments used in the Mishkan, Moshe gives an accounting and enumeration of all the contributions and of the various clothing and vessels that had been fashioned. *Bnei Yisrael* bring everything to Moshe. He inspects the handiwork and notes that everything was made according to G-d's specifications. Moshe blesses the people. G-d speaks to Moshe and tells him that the Mishkan should be set up on the first day of the first month, i.e., Nissan. He also tells Moshe the order of assembly for the Mishkan and its vessels. Moshe does everything in the prescribed manner. When the Mishkan is finally complete with every vessel in its place, a cloud descends upon it, indicating that G-d's glory rested there. Whenever the cloud moved away from the Mishkan, *Bnei Yisrael* would follow it. At night the cloud was replaced by a pillar of fire.

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## Q & A

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### Vayakhel - Questions

1. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People?
2. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbat written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan?
3. Why does the Torah specify the particular prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat right after it had already noted the general prohibition of doing work on Shabbat?
4. What function did the "*yitdot hamishkan*" serve?
5. What function did the "*bigdei hasrad*" serve?
6. What was unusual about the way the goat's hair was spun?
7. Why were the *Nesi'im* last to contribute to the building of the Mishkan? How does the Torah show dissatisfaction with their actions?
8. Who does the Torah identify as the primary builders of the Mishkan? From which tribes were they?
9. What time of day did the people bring their daily contributions for the construction of the Mishkan?
10. For what was the woven goat's hair used?
11. What image was woven into the parochet?
12. Why does the Torah attribute the building of the aron to Bezalel?
13. Where were the sculptured cherubim located?
14. How many lamps did the menorah have?
15. Of what materials was the *mizbe'ach haketoret* composed?
16. Of what material was the *mizbe'ach ha'olah* composed?
17. The *kiyor* was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt?
18. How did the *kiyor* promote peace?
19. The *kiyor* was made from the mirrors of the women who were crowding at the entrance to the Ohel Mo'ed. Why were the women crowding there?
20. Of what material were the "*yitdot hamishkan*" constructed?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise noted*

## Vayakhel – Answers

1. 35:1 - The day after Yom Kippur.
2. 35:2 - To emphasize that building the Mishkan does not supersede the laws of Shabbat.
3. 35:3 - There are two opinions: According to one opinion, this teaches that igniting a fire on Shabbat is punishable only by lashes, unlike the other "*melachot*" which are punishable by death; according to the other opinion, this teaches that violating several "*melachot*" at one time requires a separate atonement for each violation.
4. 35:18 - The edges of the curtains were fastened to them; they were then inserted into the ground so the curtains would not blow in the wind.
5. 35:19 - They covered the *aron*, the *shulchan*, the *menorah*, and the *mizbachot* when these were packed for transport.
6. 35:26 - It was spun directly from off the backs of the goats.
7. 35:27 - The *Nesi'im* reasoned that they would first let the people contribute materials needed for the Mishkan and then they would contribute whatever was lacking. The Torah shows its dissatisfaction by deleting a letter from their title.
8. 35:30, 35:34 - Bezalel ben Uri from the tribe of Yehuda; Oholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.
9. 36:3 - Morning.
10. 36:14 - It was made into curtains to be draped over the Mishkan.
11. 36:35 - Cherubim. (See Rashi 26:31)
12. 37:1 - Because he dedicated himself to its building more than anyone else.
13. 37:7 - On the two extremities of the *kaporet* (cover of the aron).
14. 37:23 - Seven.
15. 37:25,26 - Wood overlaid with gold.
16. 38:1-2 - Wood overlaid with copper.
17. 38:8 - These mirrors aided in the proliferation of the Jewish People. The Jewish women in Egypt would look in the mirrors so as to awaken the affections of their husbands who were exhausted by their slave labor.
18. 38:8 - Its waters helped a woman accused of adultery to prove her innocence.
19. 38:8 - To donate to the Mishkan.
20. 38:20 - Copper.

## Pekudei - Questions

1. Why is the word Mishkan stated twice in verse 38:21?
2. Why is the Mishkan called the "Mishkan of Testimony"?
3. Who was appointed to carry the vessels of the Mishkan in the *midbar*?
4. Who was the officer in charge of the *levi'im*?
5. What is the meaning of the name Bezalel?
6. How many people contributed a half-shekel to the Mishkan? Who contributed?
7. Which material used in the *bigdei kehuna* was not used in the coverings of the sacred vessels?
8. How were the gold threads made?
9. What was inscribed on the stones on the shoulders of the *ephod*?
10. What was on the hem of the *me'il*?
11. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear between the *mitznefet* and the *tzitz*?
12. What role did Moshe play in the construction of the Mishkan?
13. Which date was the first time that the Mishkan was erected and not dismantled?
14. What was the "tent" which Moshe spread over the Mishkan (40:19)?
15. What "testimony" did Moshe place in the *aron*?
16. What function did the *parochet* serve?
17. Where was the *shulchan* placed in the Mishkan?
18. Where was the *menorah* placed in the Mishkan?
19. Who offered the communal sacrifices during the eight days of the dedication of the Mishkan?
20. On which day did both Moshe and Aharon serve as *kohanim*?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Pekudei - Answers

1. 38:21 - To allude to the *Beit Hamikdash* that would twice be taken as a "*mashkon*" (pledge) for the sins of the Jewish People until the nation repents.
2. 38:21 - It was testimony for the Jewish People that G-d forgave them for the golden calf and allowed His *Shechina* to dwell among them.
3. 38:21 - The *levi'im*.
4. 38:21 - Itamar ben Aharon.
5. 38:22 - "In the shadow of G-d."
6. 38:26 - 603,550. Every man aged twenty and over (except the *levi'im*).
7. 39:1 - Linen (*See Rashi 31:10*).
8. 39:3 - The gold was beaten into thin plates from which threads were cut. (*See Rashi 28:6*).
9. 39:6, 39:7 - The names of the tribes.
10. 39:24,25 - Woven pomegranates and golden bells.
11. 39:31 - *Tefillin*.
12. 39:33 - He stood it up.
13. 40:17 - *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* of the second year in the desert. For seven days before this, during the consecration of Aharon and his sons, Moshe erected and dismantled the Mishkan. (*Rashi 39:29*)
14. 40:19 - The curtain of goatskin.
15. 40:20 - The *Luchot Habrit*.
16. 40:21 - It served as a partition for the *aron*.
17. 40:22 - On the northern side of the *Ohel Mo'ed*, outside the *parochet*.
18. 40:24 - On the southern side of the *Ohel Mo'ed* opposite the *shulchan*.
19. 40:29 - Moshe.
20. 40:31 - On the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Sheva Brachot (Part 4)

*A husband and wife are one soul, separated only through their descent to this world. When they are married, they are reunited again.*

Zohar HaKadosh

The second of the *Sheva Brachot* is: **Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who has created all things for His glory.**

The premise of the second blessing is taken from the Book of Yeshayah. The prophet proclaims (43:7): “Everyone who is called by My Name and whom I have created for My glory, I have fashioned, even perfected.”

In the work “*Beit Ya’akov*” based on the teachings of Rabbi Ya’akov Leiner of Izhbitz, the author explains that everything in this world reflects the Divine. Our task is to reveal the sparks of Divinity that are present everywhere and, by doing so, enhance Hashem’s Majesty.

The Chidushei HaRim was renowned for his genius even at a very young age. One day someone who had heard of his precocious brilliance decided to find out if the young boy truly deserved his reputation. He came to the boy’s house to test his sharpness and said to him: “I will give you three rubles if you can tell me where Hashem is!”

The young boy’s eyes lit up and he immediately responded: “I will give you six rubles if you can tell me where Hashem isn’t!”

Within everything that we do and experience, we are obligated to do our best to uncover Hashem’s Presence, whether what we are doing is intensely spiritual and altruistic, coming with no real physical gratification, or whether it is something that brings us enormous physical pleasure.

When a couple marry, they are beginning the process of joining together in the most absolute way. No greater sense of fulfillment and contentment can be found than that of a healthy, nurturing marriage; building a home together brings an unparalleled sense of purpose and destiny.

And that is why, as the new couple stand under the *chuppah*, our Brachah is recited at the very beginning of the *Sheva Brachot* – even before the *Chattan* and *Kallah* are directly mentioned in the blessings: to let them know that there is more to their marriage than just their own feelings of gratification. A Jewish marriage has a higher calling.

Of course, the entire Jewish People wish that their married life be full of love, contentment and accomplishment, but the *Chattan* and the *Kallah* must also internalize to their very core that their union was created “for His glory”; that the ultimate purpose of a Jewish home is to bring more Divine splendor to the world.

This concept is so fundamental that even when a husband buys his wife fine clothes and jewelry, he should have in mind that he is beautifying the Divine Presence, who is represented in this world by his wife! So writes Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz (*Shnei Luchot Habrit*).

In truth, enhancing Hashem’s Majesty in the world is not reserved for our home lives alone; it is something that each person needs to aspire to at all times and in all places. During a particularly traumatic and volatile period for the Jewish communities in Brisk and its environs, a group of Jews posed an anguished query to the Brisker Rav: “Rebbi, what will be?”

The Brisker Rav replied “What will be, I do not know. I am not a prophet. What I do know is that I must always strive to do what Hashem wants me to do.”

*To be continued...*

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Mitzvos 114 and 555 in *Sefer HaChinuch*; *Mishnah Sanhedrin* Chs. 6-11

Hashem conducts the world through two attributes: the Attribute of Kindness and the Attribute of Justice. These attributes function in a delicate balance. Usually, the Attribute of Kindness is dominant, while the Attribute of Justice fills the secondary role of maintaining law and order. When sin calls for extreme measures of justice, such as capital punishment, and Hashem's mercy nevertheless shines through, it is a lesson for humanity on how to exercise mercy even while executing justice. Moreover, these measures of mercy show us that Hashem loves every Jew, even sinners, and that the punishments He prescribes for sins are only means of atonement for the sinners' own benefit.

We are obligated to show mercy while judging, such as by delaying a life-and-death decision until the following day in case one of the judges finds a reason for exemption. Moreover, even when a person has been sentenced to death without any doubt, we are obligated to execute the sentence in the most merciful way possible, in fulfillment of the Mitzvah to "love your fellow man as yourself."

There are four kinds of capital punishment, in ascending order of severity: strangulation, beheading, burning, and stoning. *Metzudas David* observes that these are lenient versions of the capital punishments that were prevalent in olden times. Strangulation is painful and relatively slow, but it keeps the body intact. Beheading was sometimes accomplished through repeated sawing; instant beheading was an honor reserved for dignitaries. When a non-Jewish court would sentence a person to death by burning, his entire body would be incinerated — a slow and painful death. A person who was condemned to stoning would be dragged to the town square, where the townsfolk would pelt him to death. Does a person who has a holy soul, who is descended from the saintly Patriarchs and who lived a mostly righteous life deserve to be treated worse than an animal?

The Torah thus commands us to treat the condemned person respectfully and mercifully while at the same time making it clear to the public that such a sin cannot be tolerated. All forms of execution are quick, and the pain is kept at a minimum. Strangulation is performed using a tight rope wrapped in a soft fabric, and beheading is accomplished with a single swipe of the sword. Burning means pouring molten lead down the throat in a narrow stream that burns the innards but does not cause pain until it reaches there (see *Yachin*). In the case of stoning, the witnesses of the crime push the condemned person off the top of a two-story building, high enough for the impact to be fatal but low enough that he will not become dismembered. The impact of the fall is the Torah's version of stoning. A man's outer

garments are removed before the stoning so that they do not soften the impact and lengthen the man's suffering. If he survives, the two witnesses lift a massive boulder and cast it on his heart, and if he survives even this, he is pelted by the public. Since the great severity of the sin calls for an equally great measure of atonement, this particular means of execution entails suffering and is not always instantaneous, but it is not a slow death, nor does it deprive the subject of his honor.

We may explain the division of the four capital punishments as follows: The standard capital punishment is strangulation. Since a sinner does not deserve the gift of life that is contained in every breath, it is simply withheld from him. A murderer is subject to beheading by the sword because most murderers use iron weapons. The inhabitants of an idolatrous city (*ir hanidachas*) are subjected to this punishment as well. Since they have rebelled against Hashem's kingship, their death sentence is like that decreed by a king, which is usually beheading (*Metzudas David*). Adultery by a Kohen's daughter and incest with one's mother-in-law are punishable by burning. Since these people sinned severely through the passion that burned inside them, their atonement requires the burning of their innards (see *Akeidas Yitzchak* §28). Additionally, a Kohen's daughter who committed adultery deserves burning because she desecrated the holiness of Kehunah, which is compared to fire (*Maharal, Shabbos* 119b). The most severe sins are punishable by stoning because they constitute a desecration of what is written on the stone Tablets (*Rabbeinu Menachem HaBavli*).

See *Metzudas David* §549 for an esoteric approach to the four capital punishments.

At the beginning of *Parashas Vayakhel*, the Torah commands us not to execute people on Shabbos (35:3). *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that Shabbos is comparable to a day in which a king invites his entire nation to feast with him, even the lowest members of society, and it is therefore not a fitting time for execution. This is well understood in light of what we have explained above, that Hashem's love extends even to sinners.

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