

ACHIEVING GREATNESS

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Nedarim 5:4-5

Orach Chaim 398:9-11

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Gittin 45

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sanhedrin 36

After the last three parashot (Terumah, Tetzaveh and Ki Tissa) have described the design of the Mishkan / Tabernacle and its components and vessels, this week's two parashot, Vayakhel and Pekudei, describe the actual construction of the Mishkan. At the end of Parashat Pekudei (and the Book of Shemot) we read: "Moshe could not enter the Ohel Mo'ed / Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan." This was a sign of Hashem's happiness with Bnei Yisrael.

The midrash relates that the nations of the world try to entice the Jewish people by saying, "Join us, and we will give you greatness."

The Jewish people answer, "Can you give us anything as great as what G-d gave us in the desert, where we sinned against Him and He forgave us [as seen from the fact that His glory filled the Mishkan]?" R' Yaakov Leiner z"l (the "Izbicer Rebbe"; died 1878) explains:

There could be no greater closeness to G-d in "This World" than that which Bnei Yisrael experienced while living in the desert in proximity to the Mishkan. At any moment, they could tell exactly where they stood with G-d by looking at the cloud that hovered over the Tabernacle. When Hashem was pleased, His glory filled the Mishkan, and when He was angry, it left. There can be no greater joy than being so close to G-d.

However, our closeness to Hashem in the time of Mashiach will be even greater. Regarding that time, the prophet Yishayah wrote (25:9): "And they will say on that day, 'Behold this is our G-d; we hoped to Him that He would save us. This is Hashem to Whom we hoped, let us exult and be glad in his salvation'" - in even greater gladness than in the past. (Bait Yaakov)

"But the work ('ve'hamelachah') was enough . . . and there was extra ('ve'hotair')." (36:7)

The word "ve'hamelachah" / "But the work" appears in three places in Tanach - here, in the verse (Ezra 10:13), "But the work is not for one day or for two days," and in Divrei Hayamim I (29:1), "But the work is great." What can we learn from this?

R' Eliezer Papo z"l (1785-1827; rabbi in Sarajevo) writes: The work required to observe the Torah is great. There are 613 mitzvot, and who can keep them all? But the work is not for one day or for two days; rather each soul must be incarnated three or more times before its work is complete.

Alternatively, the work, i.e., mitzvot that one performs in one lifetime, can be enough if one has a real desire to observe the entire Torah, for Hashem attaches man's good thoughts to his good deeds. Or, one can get credit for observing some of the mitzvot by studying the laws of those commandments (alluded to by the fact that the word "ve'hotair" has the same letters as the word "Torah"). (Elef Ha'maggen)

In many editions of the chumash, each parashah is followed by a note indicating the number of verses in the parashah and mnemonic device to remember the number, i.e., a word or phrase whose gematria is equal to the number of verses. For example, the note at the end of the first of this week's parashot, Vayakhel, states: "122 verses; the siman / sign is 'Senuah'." ("Senuah" is a person mentioned in the book of Nechemiah; the name has a gematria of 122.)

In nearly all chumashim, however, this week's second parashah, Pekudei, which has 92 verses, has no such note printed after it. R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson z"l (1902-1994; the "Lubavitcher Rebbe") was once asked why, and he responded as follows:

"It is necessary to check older prints of the chumash, for in my opinion, this originates from a printer's omission, which was later copied by other printers. Perhaps the original siman consisted of the phrase 'bli kol' / 'without any' [see Devarim 28:55], which has a gematria of 92. Perhaps a young

printer's apprentice saw the phrase 'bli kol siman' / 'without any siman' and misunderstood its meaning, so that Parashat Pekudei was, in fact, left without any siman." (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

Thirty Days Before Pesach

Chazal designed the Pesach Seder to revolve around questions and answers. Indeed, the halachah states that if a couple has no children, the wife should recite the "Mah Nishtanah" section. And, if a person is all alone, he should ask himself the questions. Why?

R' Avraham Danzig z"l (author of the halachic compendium Chayei Adam) explains: We do so many of our mitzvot by rote, without giving them much, if any, thought. However, the lessons of Pesach are the centerpieces of our beliefs as Jews, and they are much too important to be done by rote. Therefore, Chazal required us to ask questions in order to slow us down and make us think.

Nor should the questions be limited to "Mah Nishtanah," R' Danzig writes. When the gemara describes the seder, it says, "We pour the second cup, and then the son asks." Presumably, the question that the son will ask is, "Why are you pouring a second cup of wine before washing for hamotzi?" which is not one of the questions in "Mah Nishtanah."

Moreover, R' Danzig notes, the questions of "Mah Nishtanah" could not be the questions to which the gemara refers ("... and then the son asks"), for a child could not even ask the Mah Nishtanah [unless he had been prepared beforehand, as has become common]. One of the questions is, "Why on all other nights do we eat chametz and matzah, and tonight only matzah?" How can a child know at the beginning of the meal that we will eat only matzah? Perhaps, just as on all other nights we eat chametz and matzah, right now there is only matzah on the table, but soon we will bring chametz!

Rather, "Mah Nishtanah" is a set of more sophisticated questions, whose real meaning is, "Why will our actions tonight combine signs of slavery, such as eating matzah, and freedom, such as eating while reclining?" As for the children, they should be allowed and encouraged to ask whatever questions occur to them. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Toldot Adam)

R' Shmuel Avigdor of Karlin z"l (19th century) observes that the question and answer format is not merely a creation of Chazal. It is a mitzvah de'Oraita / Torah-ordained commandment, mentioned no fewer than four times in the Torah. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Im Peirush Maharsha)

Introductions . . .

This week, we present part of the introduction to Migdal David, Sefer Emunah, by R' David Ha'kochavi. The author was born in approximately 1260 in Estella, Navarre, Spain, and he died in Provence (southern France) in approximately 1330. Migdal David, Sefer Emunah is part of a larger

work, Sefer Ha'battim, which covers both aggadic and halachic topics.

The title "tzaddik" refers in most places in the books of the Prophets to an elevated person whose soul behaves consistently with good character traits and whose intentions and deeds are desirable. "His heart is firm, confident in Hashem" [Tehilim 112:7]. He believes with a strong emunah / faith based on a received tradition. . . He has not discerned or understood the intentions of the mitzvot or their purposes . . . ; rather, his heart is wholly with Hashem our G-d regarding everything that He commanded, "and in His Torah he meditates day and night" [Tehilim 1:2] in order to know the laws of the mitzvot and all their details. . .

Others use the title "tzaddik" to refer to a person whom Hashem has filled with a spirit of wisdom and understanding, one who rules over [his own] fear of G-d and [his performance of] mitzvot. He controls his eyes and directs them to G-d's work, and he seeks among the various areas of wisdom "to understand the fear of Hashem and discover knowledge of G-d" [Mishlei 2:5]. This is a perfect tzaddik, as the Rambam has taught us that "righteousness" means "doing justice," and "justice" means "giving each thing its due." Such a person does justice with his soul, for the highest part of the soul is the intellect. . .

Just as we find that in the words of the Torah and Prophets, and in the expressions of our Sages, the word "tzaddik" is used in the two ways mentioned, so our nation is divided into two groups. One says that the proper way which a person should choose, where there is "Light sown for the righteous" [Tehilim 97:11], is meditation in the written and oral Torah day and night to know its meanings and details, which are called, "The questions of Abaye and Rava" [Sukkah 28a, referring to two Talmudic sages]. This, they say, is who finds favor in the eyes of G-d, and one who knows [the Torah] and who acts with alacrity regarding this matter and who is filled [with Torah] and whose Torah is arranged on his lips, he is the elevated one. About such a person they said [Pesachim 50a], "Fortunate is one who comes here and his learning is in his hand." . . .

The second group says that "the path of life which is loftiest for the intelligent person" [Mishlei 15:24] is to understand and to probe in order to know and comprehend through investigation the existence of Hashem and His uniqueness, while at the same time observing the mitzvot; all this, in order to know the purpose of the mitzvot. - to be continued -

Sponsored by Elaine and Jerry Taragin, in memory of Asriel Taragin a"h

Abe and Shirley Sperling & William and Ruth Konick on the yahrzeits of Tzvi Dov ben Avraham a"h (Harry Sperling) and Mindel bat Tzvi Dov a"h (Mildred Klessmer)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
