

# SHABBAT: JUST IN TIME

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Vayakhel & Pekudei

### Shabbat: Just in Time

Our parashah ends with the verse (40:38), "For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all of Bnei Yisrael throughout their journeys." Earlier we read (13:22), "He did not remove the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night from before the people."

The Gemara (Shabbat 23b) relates: The wife of the sage Rav Yosef would light Shabbat candles late. Rav Yosef told her, "We have been taught that the pillar of fire complemented the pillar of smoke, i.e., it appeared before the pillar of smoke departed, and the pillar of smoke complemented the pillar of fire." [So, too, one should bring in Shabbat while it is still day.] Thereafter, she started to light very early, until an old man [some say, Eliyahu Hanavi] told her, "We have been taught that one should not light too early or too late." [Until here from the Gemara] R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) comments: Everything has its time. When the world is ready for a particular source of illumination, it is a wonderful thing and brings man closer to G-d. But, if someone strains to bring down a particular "light" before its time, it will not be a source of blessing; rather, it will be harmful.

But, one also needs to know that all opposites in the world are really working toward the same goal--the revelation of the light that Hashem has prepared, in order that it be revealed in its proper time. Do not think that the era before the "light" has no connection with the era of the "light." To the contrary, the era before the light is the preparation for the light itself.

Accordingly, one should not light Shabbat candles too late, as if Shabbat is divorced from the days of preparation. On the other hand, however, the light of Shabbat cannot be revealed before its time either. (Ein Ayah)

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"Moshe assembled the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael and said to them, 'These are the things

that Hashem commanded, to do them. On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death'." (35:1-2)

R' Eliyahu Guttmacher z"l (1796-1874; Polish rabbi; early advocate of resettlement of Eretz Yisrael) asks: The phrase, "These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them," would seem to refer to the construction of the mishkan, which occupies the majority of our parashah. Why, then, does Moshe interrupt with a reminder to observe Shabbat? Indeed, in last week's parashah, the command to observe Shabbat is mentioned at the end of the command to build the mishkan and its implements! Why not wait until the end here also?

R' Guttmacher explains: After the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem declared (Shmot 33:2-3), "I shall send an angel ahead of you . . . because I shall not ascend among you . . ." The Torah continues (33:4), "The people heard this bad tidings and they became grief-stricken, and no one donned his jewelry." Bnei Yisrael were devastated by their loss of the opportunity to be close to Hashem.

Then, Hashem announced that He had forgiven Bnei Yisrael. He said (Shmot 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them." [Though this verse appears in the Torah before the sin of the golden calf, we are taught, "Ain mukdam u'me'uchar ba'Torah" / the Torah is not written in historical order.] Now, Bnei Yisrael were ecstatic at regaining the lost opportunity to be close to Hashem--so much so that they had to be restrained from bringing more donations after the builders had enough material.

However, Hashem limited this opportunity to become close to Him, saying (see Rashi to Shmot 31:13): Do not build the mishkan on Shabbat. With this, our initial question is answered. Moshe saw how excited Bnei Yisrael were to build the mishkan, and he feared that they would be unable to restrain themselves from finishing it as soon as possible. Therefore, he interrupted the command to build with a warning to observe Shabbat. (Derashot V'chiddushei R' Eliyahu Guttmacher Al Ha'Torah)

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"Moshe saw the entire work, and behold! they had done it -- as Hashem had commanded, so had they done! . . ." (39:43)

R' Yitzchak Karo z"l (Spain; 1458-approx. 1520) notes that forms of the verb "la'asot" / "to do" appear 248 times between the verse (Shmot 25:8), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them," and here--not including between Shmot 32:1 and 33:5, which discusses the making of the golden calf. These 248 occurrences parallel the 248 mitzvot asei / affirmative commandments. (Toldot Yitzchak)

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## Pesach

"Ha lachma anya / This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry--let him come and eat! Whoever is needy--let him come and share Pesach! Now, we are here; next year may we be in Eretz Yisrael! Now, we are slaves; next year may we be free men!" (From the Pesach Haggadah)

Commentaries ask many questions about this invitation, among them: (1) Why do we invite guests now, after kiddush? (2) What good is this invitation if we recite it sitting in our dining rooms behind a closed front door? (3) How can we say "Whoever is needy--let him come and share Pesach" when, according to halachah, the korban Pesach may be shared only with those who made such arrangements before the lamb was slaughtered?

R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1513-1583; rabbi in Egypt, Cyprus, Italy and Poland) offers a novel explanation of "Ha lachma anya" which answers these and some of the other commonly asked questions. He writes that this paragraph is not an invitation at all, but rather a lamentation composed on the first Pesach night after the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash. Sitting at their Seder tables, the Jewish People remembered the glory of the Seder when the table was graced by the korban Pesach and surrounded by family and friends who had joined together in advance as halachah requires. Remembering this, they said, "Our fare at this Seder is reminiscent of the lachma anya / poor man's bread which our ancestors ate in Egypt, not the sumptuous feasts that we had when the Temple stood. Now, anyone who is hungry can come and eat, and anyone who needs to can come and remember the korban Pesach, unlike last year when advance reservations were required by halachah. This year, we are here, but next year, may we be back in Yerushalayim as we were before the Destruction." (Ma'asei Hashem)

R' Yaakov Lorberbaum z"l (Poland; 1760-1832; the "Nesivos") explains this passage similarly, except for the ending, "Now we are here . . ." He writes: Given that now, after the Temple's destruction, we are eating the same lachma anya that our ancestors ate in Egypt, one might wonder why we are celebrating! Does a prisoner in jail celebrate the anniversary of his release from a prior incarceration?

The answer is that the Exodus was not like any other release from imprisonment. Rather, because of the bond that we formed with Hashem through the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah, we are confident that, although "now, we are here; next year" we will "be in Eretz Yisrael!" (Ma'aseh Nissim)

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## Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Moshe ben Maimon ("Rambam" or "Maimonides"; 1135-1204). It is printed in the appendix to Kol Sifrei R' Yosef Yaavetz.

I have placed Hashem before me always!

We received the letter of the elder, who is honorable and dear, the student, R' Yosef son of Abu Alfimir, who is known as ibn Jabr. He writes that he is an am ha'aretz/ unlearned, but it is clear from his letter that he works hard on Torah study, that he occupies himself with our [Arabic] commentary on the Mishnah, but that he does not understand our composition, i.e., the Mishneh Torah, because it is in Hebrew. He also mentioned that he heard from my students, may their Creator protect them, that there are those in Baghdad who have raised questions about certain matters, and he wishes to answer them. He asks that I assist him by writing to him in my own handwriting; therefore, I am doing so.

First, you must know that Hashem will always value you and increase your success because you are not an am ha'aretz. You are our student and our beloved. Anyone who wants to attach himself to the study of Torah, even if he understands only one verse or one halachah--it makes no difference whether he understands it in the Holy Tongue, Arabic, or Aramaic--the main thing is that you busy yourself with Torah study. But, if one sets aside Torah study, if he has never learned anything in his life, we will apply to him the verse, "He has despised the word of G-d." Even one who merely refrains from adding knowledge, even if he is a great scholar, he neglects the affirmative commandment to study Torah, which is equal to all other mitzvot. In general, I would say to you: Do not put yourself down and do not despair of achieving completeness

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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