

TAKE A BREAK

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The overwhelming majority of our Parashah describes Mishkan's construction, but the Parashah opens with the Mitzvah of Shabbat. Rashi z"l writes that this teaches us that building the Mishkan does not supersede Shabbat observance.

Why not? Also, why does the commandment to observe Shabbat precede the construction of the Mishkan?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Kilav shlita (now retired Av Bet Din / Chief Judge of the Yerushalayim rabbinical court) explains: The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni states, "From the beginning of the Torah to its end, there is only one Parashah which begins with, 'Vayakhel' / 'he gathered an assembly.' [It is used here because] Hashem said, 'Gather large assemblies and teach them the laws of Shabbat so that future generations will learn to gather assemblies in the Batei Medrash on Shabbat to teach them Halachot, so that My Name will be praised among My children'." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Kilav writes: Shabbat is the day of rest from physical labor, from the type of activity that belongs to the six days of action. Thus, another Midrash refers to the Jewish People as the "match" for Shabbat. All week long, we do not appear to be much different than the other nations; they work and we work. What highlights the uniqueness of the Jewish People is Shabbat. That is why we are enjoined

to learn Torah in large gatherings on Shabbat, for the Torah is the life force of the Jewish People, the source of our uniqueness. In order to merit a Mishkan, in order to merit G-d's "resting" His Shechinah among us, we must study Torah.

Now we can understand why the Mishkan may not be built on Shabbat and why the commandment to observe Shabbat has to precede the construction of the Mishkan. Building the Mishkan is a physical act, which has no place on the spiritual day. Indeed, only the act of sanctification which occurs on Shabbat makes that physical construction possible. (Aveni Bareket)

"Take from yourselves a portion for Hashem, everyone whose heart motivates him shall bring it -- 'et' / the gift for Hashem--gold, silver, copper." (35:5)

The word "et" often serves as the article "the." However, notes R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) in the name of his father, R' Chaim Meir Hager z"l (1887-1972; Vizhnitzer Rebbe), "et" also can mean "with." As such, our verse can be read, "Everyone whose heart motivates him shall bring it--i.e., his heart--with the gift for Hashem--gold, silver, copper." Everything that a person does in the service of Hashem, whether bringing a donation for the Mishkan, praying, or studying Torah, should be done with one's heart. These acts should be "lebedig"--with the heart, with "life."

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe continues: The Gemara (Berachot 6b) states that a person should have a "Makom kavuah" / "fixed place" for prayer. A person must fix a place for prayer; he should not have his feet in the Shul but his head somewhere else. "Makom" is also a term we use to refer to G-d. A person who is praying should attach all his thoughts to Hashem, leaving his business and other mundane thoughts for some other time.

One way to achieve this, explains the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, is to focus on how privileged we are to be able to pray to Hashem, the Creator of all of the worlds, at any time that we wish--something that even angels cannot do. (Yeshuot Moshe: Ma'adanei Ha'shulchan)

"Shoham stones and stones for the settings, for the Ephod and the Breastplate." (35:9)

The stones on the Breastplate served to deliver messages from Hashem to the Jewish People by lighting up to spell out words. Why, asks R' Yosef Leib Nenedik z"l Hy"d (Mashgiach Ruchani in the yeshiva in Kletsk, Poland) are they listed last among all of the precious items that were collected for the Mishkan?

He explains: These stones were donated for the Kohen Gadol's breastplate by the Nesi'im / Princes of the Tribes. The Gemara (Yoma 75a) teaches that these stones were brought to the Nesi'im miraculously by clouds. (The word "Nesi'im" can also mean "clouds.") The Princes were great people

who merited to experience a great miracle. Nevertheless, because they put no effort into acquiring these stones, the status of their gift is diminished. Hashem desires man's efforts, and an accomplishment that involves such efforts is worth more than one that does not. (Quoted in Mussarei Kletzky p.307)

"For the cloud of Hashem would be upon the Mishkan by day, and fire would be on it at night . . ."
(40:38)

R' Yitzchak Weiss z"l Hy"d (rabbi of Verbau, Czechoslovakia; killed in the Holocaust in 1942) writes: The Mishkan, where the Luchot were housed, alludes to a Torah scholar. If a Torah scholar publicizes himself, as the day is public, Hashem will bring a cloud of obscurity over him. However, if he conceals himself like an object concealed at night, Hashem will spread his fame as a fire is seen from a distance. (Siach Yitzchak)

Pesach

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994; Klausenberger Rebbe) writes: There is a longstanding custom to make the Matzot for the Seder round, not square. The reason is that square Matzot can be placed next to each other so that they look like one; round Matzot cannot be joined in this way. This reminds us that the cause of our long exile is our inability to get along. There is jealousy and hatred between us, and what one person considers to be a Mitzvah, another considers to be a sin. Additional reminders of this sad situation are the custom to have a Matzah cover with three separate compartments so that the Matzot are kept separate, and the custom to name the Matzot, "Kohen, Levi and Yisrael," emphasizing their individuality. Appropriately, the holiday of Pesach is known as "Chag Ha'matzot" – plural – not "Chag Ha'matzah" – singular. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Halichot Chaim p.21)

From the same work:

It is customary to put out ten pieces of bread before Bedikat Chametz so that the person conducting the search will find them. These ten pieces of bread are then left to be burned the next morning. The Klausenberger Rebbe suggests that these ten pieces of bread allude to the ten sons of Haman. As we prepare to celebrate our redemption on Pesach, we recall the trait that the ten sons of Haman shared with many of our enemies: their inability to see the handwriting on the wall, cut their losses, and save themselves. Haman's wife predicted his downfall, but Haman's sons did not run away to save themselves. Even after Haman was hanged--which happened on Pesach, eleven months before the appointed day for the Jewish People and their enemies to do battle--Haman's sons didn't react. The same trait, writes the Klausenberger Rebbe, a concentration camp survivor, was evident in the Germans. Long after it was clear that they would lose the war, concentration camp guards

refused to run away and save themselves; they waited to be captured. To recall this aspect of our salvation, which repeats itself throughout history, the ten pieces of bread are left to wait to meet their end. (Ibid. p.11)

“Ve’hi sh’amdah / It is this that stood by our fathers. For not only one [nation] has risen against us to annihilate us. Rather, in every generation, they rise against us to annihilate us, but the Holy One, Blessed is He, rescues us from their hand.” (The Pesach Haggadah)

What is “this” that stood by our fathers? It refers to the previous sentence in the Haggadah, which states (quoting Bereishit 15:13-14): “He said to Avram, ‘Know with certainty that your offspring will be aliens in a land not their own, they will serve them, and they will oppress them four hundred years. But also the nation that they will serve, I will judge, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth’.” Hashem’s promise to Avraham stood by our fathers when other nations tried to annihilate us.

R’ Menachem Mendel Stern z”l (rabbi of Sighet, Hungary; died 1834) asks: This seems counter-intuitive! How did Hashem’s promise that He will exile and enslave Avraham’s descendants protect our ancestors? He answers:

If a king promises a gift to one of his subjects at a future date, he presumably intends to keep his promise when the time comes. However, the king’s promise does not obligate him to protect that subject from enemies and natural disasters to ensure that he lives to see the day when the king’s promise will be kept. Likewise, it does not obligate the king to punish those who harm that subject, nor to forgive that subject if he rebels against the king.

Hashem created the world because He wants to share His goodness. Therefore, unlike a human king, He certainly will protect His subjects so that they can enjoy His goodness. We allude to this when we say (in the previous paragraph of the Haggadah): “Blessed is He Who keeps His promise to Yisrael.” He even protects us from enemies who would destroy us, as proof of which we cite His promise to Avraham that the Egyptians would succeed only in enslaving and oppressing our fathers, implying that they would be unable to annihilate us. Ultimately, Hashem promised, He will shower goodness on Bnei Yisrael by giving us the Torah and material wealth. Moreover, He will take revenge upon those who oppress the Jewish People even though our own sins are partly to blame. (Derech Emunah)