

HOW TO SANCTIFY WORK BY NOT WORKING

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you.^[2]

Rashi: He preceded the command regarding the work of the *mishkan* with a warning about Shabbos. This was to teach that the construction of the *mishkan* does not override the prohibition of labor on Shabbos.

Why would we think otherwise? Why does the Torah find it necessary to anticipate an error we might make, and correct it up front? Is there a strong argument that we should suspend the laws of Shabbos in order to speed up the completion of the *mishkan*?

Furthermore, the gemara adds a curious wrinkle to the discussion.^[3] After citing a proof-text for the law that the building of the *mishkan* must give way to the prohibitions of Shabbos, it adds these words: "All of you are obligated in My honor." Now, those words are also used by that gemara in explaining why the mitzvah of honoring parents does not trump the prohibitions of Shabbos, i.e., if a parent requests something of a child that requires violating the Shabbos laws, the child should not honor the request. Both the parent and child are required to honor Hashem! While that thought is entirely appropriate in regard to the mitzvah of *kibud av v'eim*, how do the words apply to the question of building the *mishkan* on Shabbos?

Let's step back a bit.

An old taxonomy that still works knows of four main groups of objects: inanimate, vegetative, animal, speech-endowed. *Klal Yisrael* can be seen as the vegetative relative to the inanimate of other nations. We can grow forever upwards. Yet when we are off the mark of our designated mission, we seemingly fall from the highest branch to the lowest level. But here is where a special capacity kicks in, something that is missed by the others. What seem to be lifeless forms lying at the base somehow do not lose their ability to grow. They can regenerate, and resume their vitality, like a seed coming to life.

Non-Jewish society suffers from an inversion of importance. They reduce everything to the simple building blocks of the inanimate world, from which all is built. They explain all the higher forms of life as nothing more than packages of the more simple. They cannot recognize a hierarchy in which the fundamental building blocks service and lead to what is above them. *Klal Yisrael*, on the other hand, sees the simpler elements pointing upward to the next level. They can therefore recognize the next

levels up – and the ones that are even higher, including those not of this world, but the worlds above.

The strategy of Amalek was to infect *Klal Yisrael* with this demoralizing reductionism, which left them doubting their own specialness. Amalek, however, was victimized by its own narrowness. It could not appreciate the special organic vitality of the Jewish people. It missed that special factor that would not disappear even in the apparently lifeless form of its fallen state. Amalek did not and could not appreciate that this vital core not only would return us to life, but assuredly mean future growth beyond what was previously there.

Amalek could only touch the external. It did not make a dent in this vital core. Amalek's partial success in , however, led to the sin of the *eigel*. To address that sin, Hashem gave us the mitzvah of building the *mishkan*, whose construction involved all the thirty-nine categories of creative work. The achievement of this project was to address the externality of the profane world, and to elevate it. Building the *mishkan* would sanctify the entire universe of *chol*, the profane world, to ready it for receiving a Divine presence.

Shabbos is identifiable with the inner *kedushah* of *Klal Yisrael*.^[4] That core holiness was not touched by Amalek or by the *eigel*. It didn't need the activity of *mishkan*-construction to repair it. Therefore, the building of the *mishkan* had no place on Shabbos. Its labor ceased for the holy day.

Yet, a counterargument could easily be made. The potency of this inner, core *kedushah* is hidden from us. We are taught about it, but it is not openly displayed or accessible. For this reason, we would think that that *mishkan* project should involve Shabbos as well, bringing the inner *kedushah* more to the fore.

The Torah's response is, "All of you are obligated in My honor." "Hashem's portion is His people."^[5] A deficit in the essence of *Klal Yisrael* translates into a deficit, *kivayachol*, in His honor. That cannot be. He and His honor are eternal; so it must be with the honor of *Klal Yisrael*. Indeed, it is only through the existence of that inner core of *kedushah* – whether apparent or not – that we can elevate the profane and pedestrian!

Shabbos, therefore, does not need a boost from the *mishkan's* construction. The *mishkan* waits for Shabbos.

1. Based on Mei Marom, Shemos, Maamar 110 .
2. Shemos 35:2 .
3. Yevamos 6A .
4. See this series, the entry of *parshas* Ki Sisa .
5. Devarim 32:9 .

