

JEWISH ORGANIZATION, OXYMORON OR WHAT?

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Is organization a Torah concept? Is the concept of defining a vision, setting goals, developing an action plan, and then following through, a Jewish way of doing things? Without attempting to be facetious, many of us might be laughing at the image of an organized Jewish organization. However, I would like to suggest, that because organization is a Torah concept and should be the Jewish way of life, therefore, the Saatan works overtime in making sure that we are not as organized as we should be.

Where do we see organization, planning, and execution in the Torah?

First of all in Sefer Bereishis.

1. Noach and the Tayvah (box; Ark). It certainly took exceptional organization and planning for Noach to execute a 120 year long plan.
2. Avraham and Sarah. Avraham and Sarah ran a big operation. They had a very large household as well as the many students who flocked to be with them. In their encounter with Pharaoh, Avraham exhibited an ability to plan ahead, even if his plan didn't succeed. In his battle against the Four Kings, Avraham, despite the smallness of his force, developed a strategy that successfully reorganized the balance of power in the Middle East. Along with obvious divine intervention, Avraham's army had to have been masterfully disciplined and structured. When the three angels appeared to Avraham, the story infers an organized household that Sarah and Avraham could easily marshal to provide for three unexpected guests.
3. The story of Eliezar and Rivkah reveals a strategy and focus that allowed Eliezar to accomplish his mission of finding a wife for Yitzchak.
4. The entire story of Rivkah, Yakov, and Yitzchak can be described as a lifetime of planning and manipulation. Yakov rightfully finesses the birthright from Eisav, which then requires Rivkah to orchestrate the blessings of Yitzchak. Their goal is to establish the proper spiritual basis for the twelve Tribes. Yakov out-maneuvers his uncle Lavan and successfully executes a six-year plan to amass his own fortune. In the end, he even out-smarts Eisav and peacefully returns to Eretz Yisroel.
5. One of the Torah's best examples of organization is the sale of Yoseph and his eventual re-organization of the entire Egyptian society. Not only did he understand how to balance the seven years of plenty with the seven years of famine, he understood what it would take to

protect the fledgling Am Yisroel once they arrived in Egypt.

6. Of course, the story of creation at the beginning of Bereishis is the most profound display of planning, organization, and execution possible. I personally do not know what it takes to create a universe, but something tells me that to do it right requires a bit of management.

In Sefer Shemos, the story of the Exodus, Kriyas Yam Suf, and Mattan Torah are a pattern of events that reflect scope and sequence. Whether the birth and training of Moshe, the ten plagues, or the parting of the sea, G-d clearly said He would take the Jews out of Egypt and bring them to Mt. Sinai. As He said, so He did.

The planning and building of the Mishkan is another excellent example of a national effort requiring extensive planning and organization.

The less obvious examples of planning and organization are the Mitzvos in the second half of Sefer Shemos. Each Mitzvah is part of a greater whole, and the whole is oriented toward the goal of serving G-d. As such, they represent an integrated system of performances that are self-fulfilling and motivating. Chazal (the Rabbis) captured the essence of this concept when they said, The performance of one Mitzvah generates the performance of another mitzvah.

In Sefer Vayikra, the service in the Bais Hamikdash and the appointment of Aharon and his sons to the priesthood was an overall system that demanded exacting adherence to the details of organization and execution. The strictness and severity of adhering to the specifics of the Avodah's (service in the Temple) organization in all its dimensions of time, place, and intent is underscored by how often a transgression by a Kohain is punishable by death. However, I would like to focus on a mitzvah in the Parsha Bhar as a perfect example of the Torah's demand for organization and planning.

The Torah detailed the agricultural system called Shemitah and Yovel. Every seventh year the land had to lay fallow, and every 50th year the land lay fallow for two consecutive years. G-d promised that, although it seems that such economic inactivity should result in financial disaster, He would give enough on the sixth year and the 48th year to maintain the economy until the fields had been replanted and the new crops harvested.

Nowhere in the Torah does it say that the excesses of the sixth and 48th years would magically maintain the economy. In fact, the Torah says, And you will have to remove the old grain to make room for the new grain. (Vayikra 26:10). This paints a picture of a farmer having to organize his granaries to manage the excess of produce. What happened if the farmer didn't store the excess, and instead ate it all, or sold it all? Would G-d's promise make more grain magically appear to sustain his family and business? Obviously not! G-d expected us to manage our finances and businesses so that excess income would be held in reserve and properly managed for the leaner years. Unfortunately for us, G-d's promises do not negate the often shortsightedness of our free will.

(Think credit cards).

In this week's Parsha, the first in Sefer Bamidbar, the importance of organization is impossible to ignore. As the Bnai Yisroel prepared to enter Eretz Yisroel, the nation had to be counted and organized. Approximate numbers would not do. The census was taken and responsibilities were assigned. To fulfill His promise to the Forefathers, G-d insisted that the nation embrace the importance of their mission through proper preparation.

Organization provides each component of a system with an understanding of its contribution to the whole. As the Bnai Yisroel rallied around their individual flags and arranged themselves into their assigned camps, the importance of each Jew in accomplishing the national goal became clear. All of them were gathered around the Mishkan. All of them were subservient to Moshe's instructions and directions. All of them were essential in settling the land and creating a Torah mandated society.

The importance of organization is as evident today as it was 3,000 years ago. The strength of our people is in unity, not division. Regardless of the fact that we might come from 12 different tribes, we all are part of a system with a single vision and goal. Each of us must evaluate our personal destinies in relation to our national mission. If the goal is important, we must be prepared to sacrifice time, effort, money, and emotion in doing our part. If the goal is important then we must be prepared to adjust our thinking and feelings in attaining the goal.

The goal of Am Yisroel is to serve G-d and sanctify His name. Our actions should proclaim the wisdom and morality of a G-dly life style. Synagogues and Yeshivos are the communal banners around which families and individuals must rally their efforts and reassess their individual and collective goals. We must view ourselves as but one component in a much more detailed and complex organization. If we are able to do so, we can set aside personal reservations and questions and focus on doing the work of accomplishing the collective goal. No one person has a claim on the communal goal. Likewise, no one person has the right to ignore his or her part in accomplishing the communal goal.

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