

RABBEINU EPHRAIM EXPANDS ON THE IDEA OF

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Terumah

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By

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #890 Shul Windows: An Open or Closed Case? Good Shabbos!

I would like to begin with a short "vort" from Rabbeinu Ephraim. Rabbeinu Ephraim was one of the early Talmudic commentators. Tosfos quotes him many times in Shas. Rabbeinu Ephraim makes the following comment: The Torah lists the materials used in the construction of the Mishkan. The first time the materials are listed, the Torah enumerates them in descending order: Gold, silver, and copper.

Rabbeinu Ephraim says that "gold, silver, and copper" is a reference to three types of individuals who donate to charitable causes. Zahav (zayin-hay-beis) is an acronym for "Zeh Hanosen Bari" - this is the one who gives charity when healthy. This is the highest level of charity giving. Kesef (kaf-samech-peh) is an acronym for "K'shera-ah Sakanah Poseach" - this is the one who gives charity when he sees danger approaching. A person who does not "open up his wallet" until he perceives danger on the horizon is demonstrating a lower level of generosity. Finally, Nechoshes (nun-ches-shin-taf) is an acronym for "Nadar Choleh Sheyomar Tenu" -- someone who is already sick and perhaps even on his death bed before he is prepared to give charitably so that he will recover from his illness. This is the lowest level of charitable giving.

The Mishkan Is the Unifying Force That Holds Everything Together

In the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah mentions that the system of identifying the various tribes during their travels in the wilderness by having each associated with distinctly colored flags (Degalim) began during their second year of travels following the Exodus. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in his sefer Emes L'Yaakov asks why it took them a whole year to come up with this system?

Rav Yaakov comments that the disparate flags really were a symbol of the differences that existed within the Jewish people. The different colors and different drawings represented on the flags connoted the different personalities and different approaches that were present in each of the distinct tribal families. The flag that each tribe had was thus really a reason for divisiveness and separation between them. The Lion on the flag of Yehudah, the Donkey on the flag of Yissachar, and the Snake on the flag of the Tribe of Dan all represented the different philosophies and approaches represented by each of those tribes.

If truth be told, the flags were bad news rather than good news. However, in the end, the reason it was tolerable was because there was a Mishkan in the middle. The Mishkan served as a unifying force for all the disparate elements amongst the Jewish people. Despite the fact that there are different ways of looking at life, ultimately, we are all in it for the same reason - to serve the Almighty. The Mishkan is the central focus for all of us, regardless of where we are coming from. As Rav Yaakov says, just as there is no dissension between one's eyes and one's ears (even though the purpose of the eyes is to see and the purpose of the ears are to hear and these are disparate purposes), they are both present only to serve the man who has these organs.

The Mishkan was the entity that bound all the disparate elements within Jewish society together. This is why, until the Mishkan was established during the second year of their travels, the flags could not be implemented. The Almighty did not want flags - representing divisiveness in Klal Yisrael - to be present before the antidote to this divisiveness - the centralized Mishkan - was fully functioning. Once the Mishkan, with its unifying capacity was present, they could have the liberty of demonstrating their different approaches to life, as symbolized by the disparate flags.

Today, the Beis HaKenesses [Synagogue or shul] is our "Mishkan". The role of a shul in Jewish life is also to be this uniting force for 12 tribes in Klal Yisrael, who had 12 different philosophies and 12 ways of doing things. Nevertheless, the Mikdash / Mishkan / Beis HaKenesses are institutions which can and should bind us together.

The Magen Avraham cites in the name of the Ari, z"l, that there are different nusschaos [prayer liturgies] within the Jewish people. There is Nussach Ashkenaz, there is Nussach Sefard, there is Nussach Ari, there is Nussach Sefaradi - all sorts of different nusschaos. The various forms of prayer liturgy correspond with differing approaches of the 12 Tribes that existed in Klal Yisrael.

There were 12 Tribes. There were 12 ways of doing things. This is why the Ari, z"l, says that one

should NOT change his nussach, passed down to him from his father and his family before him.

The fact that there are 12 Tribes, representing different ways of doing things and corresponding to different nusschaos of prayer, is the reason why it is customary for a synagogue to have 12 windows, symbolizing that each Tribe has its own pathway to the Master of the Universe. The Jewish people are not monolithic. They never have been and they never will be. We are diverse, but we should all be unified around the central idea of the Mishkan.

With this idea, we can perhaps gain some further insight into the role of the "techashim" in the Mishkan. The Torah says that included in the materials used in the construction of the Mishkan were "ram skins that are dyed red, techashim skins, and shittim wood" [Shemos 25:5]. Rashi explains "techashim skins" by telling us "This is a type of animal which existed only at that time. It had many colors..." The Mishkan consisted of boards plus the hides that covered them. The hides were these multi-colored animal skins -- the red-dyed rams' hides and the multi-colored techashim skins.

There is a dispute in the Talmud [Shabbos 28]. Rav Nechemia holds that the two hides were two separate pieces. According to his opinion, the Mishkan was first covered with rams' hides and then on top of that they laid the techashim hides. Rav Yehudah disagrees and holds that the covering was a single piece of material consisting of rams' hides and techashim hides sewn together. The problem with Rabbi Yehudah's opinion is that it seems to be contradicted by an explicit pasuk later on in the parsha: "And you shall make a covering for the tent of reddened rams' skins and the hides of techashim above [Shemos 26:14]. This seems to support Rav Nechemia's position that they were two separate pieces with the rams on the bottom and the techashim on top.

Rav Meir Simcha, in his Meshech Chochmah, cites an interpretation from his father that defends the position of Rav Yehudah against the plain implication of this pasuk. Rav Meir Simcha says that it is true that the two pieces of hide were sewn together, but they made sure that the location of the hides of the techashim was above the place of the Holy of Holies. "The hides of the techashim were above" means they were above the Holy of Holies, not necessarily above the hides of the rams.

The Sefer Imrei Baruch observes the symbolism inherent in this interpretation: The hides of the techashim, which were multi-colored, occupied the holiest place in the Mishkan. The multi-colored hides are symbolic of the multi-colored Jewish nation. Just as the different colored flags of the Tribes represented their multi-dimensional approaches and philosophies, so too the multi-colored hides represent the multi-dimensional nature of the Jewish people. This polychromatic nature of the Mishkan covering, representing what Klal Yisrael is all about, is positioned in the highest and most holy place of the Mishkan.

Diversity, different approaches, and the fact that there are different ways of looking at things within a Torah outlook is appreciated. This idea plays a prominent role within the Jewish nation and within the Jewish religion. Unfortunately, in our days and times this approach sometimes seems to be lost. Today, there seems to be a lack of tolerance for diversity. The prevailing attitude is "it is either my

way or the highway." The popular consensus is that "we are right and everyone else is wrong." This is not the way it was historically.

This is not the way the Shevatim were. When Yaakov looked at his sons, he saw 12 different personalities with 12 different approaches. It is something he encouraged. There is an antidote to this phenomenon, a way of protecting ourselves from divisiveness. The antidote is the "Mishkan in their midst". At the end of the day, we are all in it for one thing. The approaches may be different but the goal (tachlis) is the same.

The Talmud teaches in Tractate Taanis [31a], that in the future the Almighty will form a circle of righteous men. The Divine Presence will be in the middle of the circle and everyone will point to the middle of the circle and say "This is Hashem who we longed for."

There is a geometric property of a circle that is most relevant here - namely that every point on the circle is equidistant from its center. No place is closer and no place is farther. The Talmud speaks of a future time - a time after we go through our current exile and we go through all the disputes and divisions that exist today when everyone argues: "this is the right way; I am closer and you are further from the Almighty". In that future time, G-d will make a circle and sit in the middle and all the righteous on the circle - from all the different "camps" - will point to the center and proclaim "This is Hashem; this is the G-d we have been worshiping all along!" They will then turn around and see that everyone is equidistant. No one is more right and no one is more wrong. This is the Klal Yisrael of the future that the Ribono shel Olam envisions.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Terumah are provided below:

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