

# PARSHAS VAYAKHEL - GETTING DIRECTED

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

## Getting Directed <sup>1</sup>

Getting firmly oriented in the parshios of the Mishkan can be fairly...disorienting. Without devoting attention to details of the Torah's expressions, we have no chance of rescuing our parshios from our feelings of frustration and inadequacy. What are we to make of a prolonged and repeated succession of construction numbers and details? We recognize that if it is Torah, we are looking at a treasure trove of meaning and profundity - and yet its intended impact evades us.

If we want to understand the details of the Mishkan, we have to carefully scrutinize and account for the details of their description in the Torah.

Two verb-forms are used throughout the parshios of both the building of the Mishkan and the avodah: *terumah* and *tenufah*. Both concern directing something to a different direction or place. If we try to be more precise we realize that *terumah* (literally, raising up) directs in an upward direction, while *tenufah* (literally, waving) directs laterally, from one side to another. We first react to them as if they were interchangeable, until we detect a pattern that begs for explanation.

To begin with, they sometimes turn up in the same place at the same time. Some *korbanos* require that the *kohen* moving about of specified parts of the animal. Halachically, both *terumah* and *tenufah* are included in the avodah of both the *chazeh* (chest) and the *shok* (thigh). Each is waved both up and laterally. Yet the Torah speaks of the *chazeh ha-tenufah* (the waved chest) and the *shok ha-terumah* (the lifted up thigh). Surely this is significant!

In our parsha, the Torah couples silver and *nechoshes* [2] with *terumah* - "*terumas kesef u-nechoshes* [3]." Yet further along, the Torah switches to *tenufah* - "*zahav he-tenufah; nechoshes ha-tenufah* [4]."

Unless we are mistaken, this is all very deliberate and precise. The two words describe two different tasks that Hashem assigned to us in using His world properly.

Some things stand ready to be used for a Divine purpose. Eyes trained to look for advancing Hashem's agenda easily see how some things stand ready to be utilized. Their orientation towards furthering Hashem's plans is fully part of their makeup. All we need do is direct them to the proper place, to deliver them to where they can be best used. This is symbolized by *tenufah*, by simply moving in a different direction, but within the same plane. They are simply moved to the best

position, like a missing piece in a puzzle.

Other things, however, require an extra step. Potentially, they can also be put to good use in moving the world to a better state. Before they can assume such a role, however, they must become something different, something higher. When a person takes one of these items and presses it into Divine service, he must elevate it to a different purpose from that which it would ordinarily seem most suited. This elevation is what stands behind the concept of *terumah*, raising up.

We can see this readily in regard to the *avodah* of the *shelamim*. The diaphragm roughly divides a person between upper and lower regions. The animal selected as a *korban* stands as a symbolic surrogate for the people who offer it. The thigh is one of the organs of locomotion, of pedestrian bodily function. In sharp contrast, the chest represents the upper, or higher aspects of life, starting with the feelings and emotions associated in our speech with the heart, and the even higher forms associated with thought. Together, they suggest spiritual capabilities. Nothing is more intuitive or natural for the serious *Eved Hashem* than to apply these capabilities to His service. Our job is simply to move them, to do *tenufah*, to the right place. Their orientation towards this purpose is essential and organic. They move - but in the same plane that they began.

Other parts of our being do not seem to belong to the world of the spiritual at all. By nature, they are part of a different universe of values, of things physical and material. They are symbolized by the *shok*, the thigh. The *Eved Hashem* will look for ways to use them in the service of Hashem, and he will find them - but he will first have to elevate them. *Terumah*, elevation, is justly coupled with the *shok*.

The same symbolic framework applies to the metals used in the *Mishkan*. Metals have a number of properties that make them useful. They are malleable. Whether through heat or hammering, metals can be forced to take a specific shape. Once formed this way, metals retain that shape - including some that display enormous structural stability and rigidity.

Additionally, many metals are commonly found associated with various impurities. To make good use of them requires a many-faceted labor of purification.

Taken all together, the metals occupy points on a symbolic continuum. At one end stands gold, already purified and refined. It is the king of the metals, a substance of beauty that can be beaten, twisted and shaped, after which it will hold that shape. The Torah speaks, therefore, of *zahav ha-tenufah*, of gold that needs only be moved into the proper position to maximize *kevod Shomayim*.

At the other end of the continuum is *nechoshes*. Relative to the luster of gold, *nechoshes* seems to lack any refinement at all. Silver stands between the extremes, suggesting something in which purification has begun but requires still more refinement. Both *nechoshes* and *kesef* are appropriately joined to *terumah*, because they require elevation before they can do the best they are capable of. One *pasuk* poses a serious challenge to this treatment. It speaks of *nechoshes ha-tenufah* [5]. Why would *nechoshes*, on the lowest rung of purity, be associated with *tenufah*, as if

already waiting and able to play an important role in Divine service?

The Torah calls attention to one of the most important themes and truths about Judaism. Holiness is not detached and abstracted from the realm of the ordinary. It resides comfortably within the everyday materials and events of life. The altar must stand directly on the ground, with no intervention. When Bnei Yisrael first entered the Land, they set up an altar not on the plush, verdant slopes of Har Gerizim, but on the desolate face of neighboring Har Eival. The Torah suggests by this that all things of this world, even the least obvious and attractive, can and must be used in G-d's service. To be sure, we have to first change and elevate many things, and many forces within us. Yet this terumah, this refinement, is in the end nothing more but the natural orienting of everything towards Hashem.

The terumah of the lowest order of things, of nechoshes, is in the final analysis nothing more than its real tenufah.

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1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Shemos 35:22
  2. Depending on the commentator, some metal of lesser worth like copper, bronze, or some alloy
  3. Shemos 35:24
  4. Shemos 38:24, 29
  5. Shemos 38:29
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