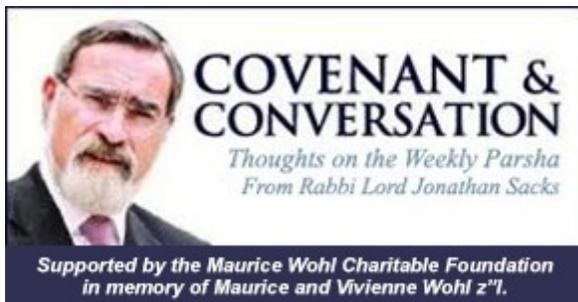


In This Issue:

- **Covenant & Conversation** by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
- **M'oray Ha'Aish** by Rabbi Ari Kahn
- **Torah Teasers** by Rabbi Moshe Erlbaum
- **Outlooks & Insights** by Rabbi Zev Leff



Celebrate

If leaders are to bring out the best in those they lead, they must give them the chance to show they are capable of great things, and then *they must celebrate their achievements*. That is what happens at a key moment toward the end of our parsha, one that brings the book of Exodus to a sublime conclusion after all the strife that has gone before.

The Israelites have finally completed the work of building the Tabernacle. We then read:

So all the *work* on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was *completed*. The Israelites did

everything just as the Lord commanded Moses ... Moses inspected the *work* and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses *blessed* them. ([Ex. 39:32](#), 43)

The passage sounds simple enough, but to the practised ear it recalls another biblical text, from the end of the Creation narrative in Genesis:

The heavens and the earth were *completed* in all their vast array. On the seventh day God finished the *work* He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His *work*. Then God *blessed* the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the *work* of creating that He had done. ([Gen. 2:1-3](#))

Three key words appear in both passages: “work,” “completed” and “blessed.” These verbal echoes are not accidental. They are how the Torah signals intertextuality, hinting that one law or story is to be read in the context of another. In this case, the Torah is emphasising that Exodus ends as Genesis began, with a work of creation. Note the difference as well as the similarity. Genesis began with an act of *Divine* creation. Exodus ends with an act of *human* creation.

The closer we examine the two texts, the more we see how intricately the parallel has been constructed. The creation account in

Genesis is tightly organised around a series of sevens. There are seven days of Creation. The word “good” appears seven times, the word “God” thirty-five times, and the word “earth” twenty-one times. The opening verse of Genesis contains seven words, the second fourteen, and the three concluding verses 35 words. Always multiples of seven. The complete text is 469 (7×67) words.

The account of the construction of the Tabernacle in Vayakhel-Pekudei is similarly built around the number seven. The word “heart” appears seven times in [Exodus 35:5-29](#), as Moses specifies the materials to be used in the construction, and seven times again in 35:34 – 36:8, the description of how the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiav will carry out the work. The word *terumah*, “contribution” appears seven times in this section. In chapter 39, describing the making of the priestly vestments, the phrase “as God commanded Moses” occurs seven times. It occurs again seven times in chapter 40.

A remarkable parallel is being drawn between God’s creation of the universe and the Israelites’ creation of the Sanctuary. We now understand what the Sanctuary represented. It was a micro-cosmos, a universe in miniature, constructed with the same precision and “wisdom” as the universe itself, a place of order against the formlessness of the wilderness and the ever-threatening chaos of the human heart. The Sanctuary was a visible reminder of God’s

Presence within the camp, itself a metaphor for God’s Presence within the Universe as a whole.

A large and fateful idea is taking shape. The Israelites - who have been portrayed throughout much of Exodus as ungrateful and half-hearted - have now been given the opportunity, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to show that they are not irredeemable, and they have embraced that opportunity. They are proven capable of great things. They have shown they can be creative. They have used their generosity and skill to build a mini-universe. By this symbolic act they have shown they are capable of becoming, in the potent rabbinic phrase, “God’s partners in the work of creation.”

This was fundamental to their re-moralisation and to their self-image as the people of God’s covenant. Judaism does not take a low view of human possibility. We do not believe we are tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of moral grandeur. To the contrary, the very fact that we are in the image of the Creator means that we humans – uniquely among life forms – have the ability to be creative. As Israel’s first creative achievement reached its culmination Moses blessed them, saying, according to the Sages, “May it be God’s will that His presence rests in the work of your hands.”¹ Our potential greatness is that we can create structures, relationships and lives that become homes for the Divine Presence.

Blessing them and celebrating their achievement, Moses showed them what they could be. That is potentially a life-changing experience. Here is a contemporary example:

In 2001, shortly after September 11th, I received a letter from a woman in London whose name I did not immediately recognise. She wrote that on the morning of the attack on the World Trade Centre, I had been giving a lecture on ways of raising the status of the teaching profession, and she had seen a report about it in the press. This prompted her to write and remind me of a meeting we had had eight years earlier.

She was then, in 1993, the Head Teacher of a school that was floundering. She had heard some of my broadcasts, felt a kinship with what I had to say, and thought that I might have a solution to her problem. I invited her, together with two of her deputies, to our house. The story she told me was this: morale within the school, among teachers, pupils and parents alike, was at an all-time low. Parents had been withdrawing their children. The student roll had fallen from 1000 children to 500. Examination results were bad: only 8 per cent of students achieved high grades. It was clear that unless something changed dramatically, the school would be forced to close.

We talked for an hour or so on general themes: the school as community, how to create an ethos, and so on. Suddenly, I

realised that we were thinking along the wrong lines. The problem she faced was practical, not philosophical. I said: "I want you to live one word: *celebrate*." She turned to me with a sigh: "You don't understand – we have *nothing* to celebrate. Everything in the school is going wrong." "In that case," I replied, "*find* something to celebrate. If a single student has done better this week than last week, celebrate. If someone has a birthday, celebrate. If it's Tuesday, celebrate.' She seemed unconvinced, but promised to give the idea a try.

Now, eight years later, she was writing to tell me what had happened since then. Examination results at high grades had risen from 8 per cent to 65 per cent. The enrolment of pupils had risen from 500 to 1000. Saving the best news to last, she added that she had just been made a Dame of the British Empire – one of the highest honours the Queen can bestow – for her contribution to education. She ended by saying that she just wanted me to know how a single word had changed the school, and her life.

She was a wonderful teacher, and certainly did not need my advice. She would have discovered the answer on her own anyway. But I was never in any doubt that the strategy would succeed, for we all grow to fill other people's expectations of us. If they are low, we remain small. If they are high, we walk tall.

The idea that each of us has a fixed quantum of intelligence, virtue, academic ability, motivation and drive is absurd. Not all of us can paint like Monet or compose like Mozart. But we each have gifts, capacities, that can lie dormant throughout life until someone awakes them. We can achieve heights of which we never thought ourselves capable. All it takes is for us to *meet someone who believes in us, challenges us, and then, when we have responded to the challenge, blesses and celebrates our achievements*. That is what Moses did for the Israelites after the sin of the Golden Calf. First he got them to create, and then he blessed them and their creation with one of the simplest and most moving of all blessings, that the Shechinah should dwell in the work of their hands.

Celebration is an essential part of motivating. It turned a school around. In an earlier age and in a more sacred context it turned the Israelites around. So celebrate.

When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why do you think these passages about creation are structured in multiples of seven?
2. Why did Rabbi Sacks' advice have such a deep impact on the school in the story?

3. Could you apply this idea of celebration to a group of people you work or socialise with?

NOTES

1. Sifrei, Bamidbar, Pinchas, 143.



A Happy Ending

As we arrive at the end of the Book of Shmot (Exodus), we are left with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the book seems to have a happy ending. Any reader who appreciates the hopelessness of the situation of the Israelite slaves in Egypt as they are described in the book's early chapters, and contrasts their plight with the end of the book, where the people are free and spiritually attuned, must declare Shmot an exceptional narrative of liberation, a victorious *tour de force*.

Reading through the book in more detail would most likely lead the reader to the same conclusion: The book of Shmot is a success story, describing an unparalleled, epic march from slavery to salvation, from redemption to revelation. The hated, obstinate Pharaoh and

his sadistic henchmen are punished, measure for measure: Their cruelty and arrogance lead them to the bottom of the sea. The Jews march to Sinai, witness the most glorious theophany in human history, and build a sanctuary in which this singular revelation can be recalled, recast and repeated on a daily basis. Shmot ends as the Glory of God fills the Mishkan, in the midst of this unique nation.

Surely, as might be expected, there were some setbacks -- small "mini- rebellions," a degree of grumbling and complaining, a minor "military action"...even one glaring, glistening, golden transgression. But surely, by the end of the book, all has been forgiven and forgotten. Or has it?

This is the question that gnaws at us: Was this, in fact, the way the book was supposed to end? At first glance, the question seems absurd; what better final chapter could we have hoped for? The Glory of God Himself had descended into the completed Temple (*Mishkan*). The entire camp was transformed into a place of holiness, like no other known to mankind. The Children of Israel stood poised to continue their journey, to fulfill their destiny.

And therein lies the rub: This entire generation will never make it to the Promised Land. Likewise, their leader Moshe will never step foot in the "Land flowing with milk and honey."

As originally scripted, the "screenplay" was quite different: After a short stopover at Sinai, where the people would gain the spiritual focus and energy that would carry them forward to their final destination, Moshe should have led the glorious march that ended in Jerusalem. There, the Presence of God would have filled the newly-built Temple, the Beit HaMikdash, the eternal seat of God on earth. The Word of God should have rung out from Jerusalem, as teachings of decency, peace and freedom began, first as a ripple but soon as a tidal wave of righteousness, to sweep across and enlighten the world. The inhabitants of the land would have bowed their heads, acknowledging that the rightful owners had come home; they would have handed them the keys and politely excused themselves.

But this is not how the book ends. In fact, the entire scenario never came to fruition - not for Moshe's generation, nor for any other. The entire generation that experienced the great miracles described throughout Shmot, all the adults who entered into the Covenant at Sinai, perished in the desert, as did Moshe.

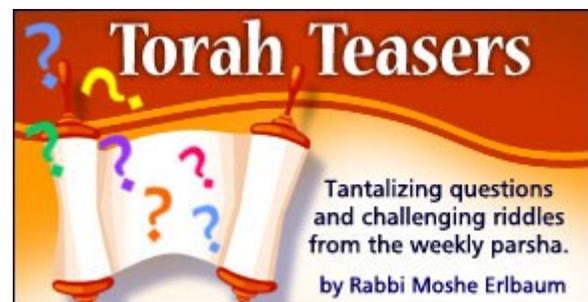
If we read the last chapters of Shmot while considering what should have been, the ending of the book is a bittersweet tale of missed opportunity. What we thought was a story of triumph becomes a description of failure. Shmot concludes as the temporary temple, the Tabernacle or Mishkan, is

consecrated. In fact, the Mishkan should never have existed; it is but a cheap imitation of what was meant to be. Clearly, had the building of the permanent Temple, the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem, not been delayed, there would have been no need for a temporary construct that would accompany them on their travels through the wilderness. The forty-year sojourn in the desert was not a part of the original plan; it was a result of those "little rebellions" and that golden calf. In fact, our bad choices had far more impact than we might care to consider. Those choices forced a detour - geographical, chronological and spiritual - that led us so far away from our goal that even after millennia we have not achieved it.

Was the building of the Mishkan a pyrrhic victory? Are there times in our own lives when we do the same - celebrate what we think is a great accomplishment, without realizing that we are actually settling for a mere shadow of what could or should have been? Do we settle for spiritually inferior accomplishments, basking in their modest glory while stunting our imagination, not allowing ourselves to strive higher, to envision our souls, and indeed the entire world, perfected?

The Book of Shmot has come to an end, yet the story it should have recorded remains untold. The mission remains unfinished. We are charged with taking up the vision of what should have been, and seeing it through. In

order to do so, we must liberate our minds from the artificial boundaries we have imposed upon ourselves, and envision a world elevated and free, a world in which the story of the Exodus finally reaches its glorious intended conclusion.



Torah Teasers Parshat Vayakhel

1. This parsha begins with Moshe assembling the entire congregation together ([Exodus 35:1](#)). What are two other places in the Torah where someone gathers together a congregation?

In parshas Korach, Korach gathers a rebellious congregation around Moshe and Aharon ([Numbers 16:19](#)). In parshas Chukas, Moshe and Aharon gather together the congregation before bringing forth water from the rock ([Numbers 20:10](#)).

2. In this parsha, what four types of jewelry do the Jews donate to the Mishkan?

The people bring "bracelets, nose rings, rings, and body jewelry" ([Exodus 35:22](#)).

3. In this parsha, what is done "every morning" (*baboker baboker*)? What else in the Torah is done "every morning"? (3 answers)

Bnei Yisrael continue to bring gifts to Moshe for the Tabernacle, "every morning" (*baboker baboker*) ([Exodus 36:3](#)). The same expression is used in the following three places: (1) In parshas Beshalach, describing when the Manna is collected ([Exodus 16:21](#)). (2) In parshas Tezaveh, when the Torah describes how Aharon burns the incense every morning ([Exodus 30:7](#)). (3) In parshas Tzav when the Torah describes how Aharon kindled wood every morning to keep a fire burning on the altar ([Leviticus 6:5](#)).

4. Where in this parsha are wings mentioned?

The cherubs had wings that spread over the Holy Ark ([Exodus 37:9](#)).

5. Which two items in the Tabernacle are made of one solid piece of gold? What other item, used in the desert, was fashioned from one solid piece of metal?

The cover and cherubs on top of the Holy Ark is made "of one banged out solid piece of gold" ([Exodus 37:7](#)), as is the Menorah (37:17) In parshas Beha'aolscha, Moshe is commanded to fashion two trumpets, each out of "one solid piece of banged out silver" ([Numbers 10:1](#)).

6. Which three items found in the Tabernacle are a perfect square?

The following items are shaped as squares: the Golden Altar ([Exodus 37:25](#)), the Copper Altar (38:1), and the breastplate (*choshen*) of the High Priest (39:9)

Torah Teasers Parshat Pekudei

1. What type of coin, mentioned in this parsha, is mentioned only one other time in the Torah (and where)?

Each person was expected to donate to the Tabernacle a *beka* of silver, the value of half a *shekel* ([Exodus 38:26](#) with Rashi). In parshas Chayeh Sarah, when Eliezer gives gifts to Rivkah, the earring has the weight of a *beka* ([Genesis 24:22](#) with Rashi).

2. Of all the precious metals collected for the Tabernacle, which had the largest amount?

Silver, with a tally of 100 (*kikar*) talents and 1,775 shekels, is collected in the greatest amount ([Exodus 38:25](#)).

3. What precious stone appears three times on the clothing of the High Priest?

The *shoham* stone is twice on the shoulder straps of the *ephod* (39:8), and also appears on the fourth row of the breastplate (*choshen*) ([Exodus 39:13](#)).

4. Which two of the 12 stones found on the breastplate (*choshen*) are mentioned elsewhere in the Torah - not in relation to the Tabernacle?

(1) The *sapir* stone is on the *choshen* ([Exodus 39:11](#)) and also mentioned in

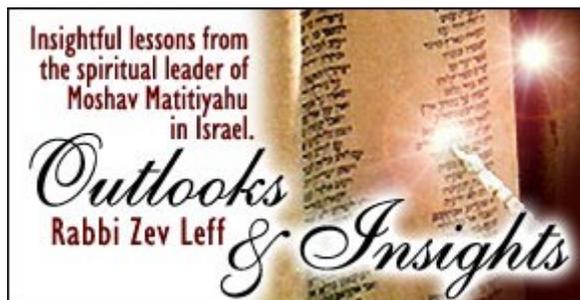
parshas Mishpatim as the vision the elders saw at Mount Sinai ([Exodus 24:10](#)). (2) The *shoham* stone which is on both the *choshen* (39:13) and the straps of the *ephod* (35:9) also appears in parshas Bereishis when describing the rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 2:12](#)).

5. Where in this parsha are bells mentioned?

"Golden bells" appear on the bottom of the robe (*me'il*) worn by the High Priest ([Exodus 39:25](#)).

6. In what context is fire mentioned, in both parshas Vayekhel and parshas Pekudei?

Fire is mentioned at the beginning of Vayekhel with regards to keeping Shabbat ([Exodus 35:3](#)), and in the last verse of Pekudei regarding the pillar of fire that led the Jewish people through the desert at night ([Exodus 40:38](#)).



Two Aspects of the Mishkan

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: The name Betzalel indicates his wisdom, for when God told Moses

to tell Betzalel to make a Mishkan (tabernacle), an Ark, and the other vessels, Moses reversed the order and said to him, "Make an Ark and the vessels and the Mishkan."

Betzalel then said to him, "Moses, the way of the world is to build a house and then bring into it the vessels, but you told me to first make the vessels and then the Mishkan. Where will I put the vessels that I make? Perhaps God told you to make the Mishkan first and then the Ark and vessels."

Moses responded, "You are called Betzalel - (literally) in the shadow of God, for you knew precisely how to interpret God's words as if you were there, in his shadow." (Talmud - [Brachot 55a](#))

To understand this difficult piece of Talmud requires an appreciation of the Mishkan and its vessels. That in turn depends on understanding the relationship of our bodies to our souls.

We live in a physical world, and our soul is confined in a physical body. For that reason, says *Sefer Hachinuch*, that which we experience physically makes a stronger impression on us and, in turn, motivates our hearts and souls. Thus, for instance, the eating and drinking on Yom Tov is designed to bring out the spiritual joy of our souls. The performance of actions associated with happiness, and not the mental contemplation

of happiness, engenders that emotional state.

The proper external actions are, according to *Sefer Hachinuch*, the means by which one reaches the proper inner intention. For that reason, one must occupy himself in the study of Torah - even not for its own sake, for learning will eventually bring him to Torah for its own sake.

The majestic and awe-inspiring Mishkan similarly was a physical environment which exercised the most profound effect on all who beheld it. The physical impression it created was transmuted into a powerful inner feeling.

Physical actions have another purpose beyond arousing the proper inner attachment to God. Our task in this world is to place our spiritual beings in control of our physical beings. When we act in conformity with our deepest spiritual perceptions, we are actualizing our inner potential. Nachmanides explains ([Genesis 22:1](#)) that the essence of the tests to which God subjects *tzaddikim* is that it allows them to realize their spiritual potential in action. Actions performed with the proper intention infuse all realms of the world with spiritual power.

The Sages derive from the command to gild the Holy Ark from both the inside and outside with gold, that a Torah scholar must be the same inside and outside (*tocho ke'baro*), seemingly implying that his inner state must

be brought into conformity with his external state.

If we examine the commandment of gilding the Ark, we notice something interesting. There is first a general command to gild the Ark: "*You shall gild it with pure gold*" ([Exodus 25:11](#)). Then the Torah specifies, "*from within and without you shall gild it.*" The first general command relates to the outside of the Ark, the physical which engenders the inner emotions. Then after mentioning the internal covering, the Torah again mentions the covering of the outside. This symbolizes the external expression that must be given to the perfected inner intention, the realization of the inner potential.

This same dynamic relation between external action and inner intent is symbolized by the Mishkan itself. Prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the Mishkan was not needed for God's presence to devolve upon the Jewish people (see Sforno to [Exodus 20:21](#)): "*...in all places where I record my name I will come unto you, and I will bless you*" ([Exodus 20:21](#)). With the sin of the Golden Calf, however, the people showed that they needed a physical entity upon which to focus their attention in order to experience God's presence. The Mishkan served this need, and hence only there could God's Presence be felt in its full intensity.

The commentary *Meshech Chochma* notes that in Parshas Ki Tisa the discussion of Shabbos follows the discussion of the Mishkan. In Parshas Vayakhel, the order is

reversed. Shabbos strengthens our belief in God as the Creator of the Universe. As originally conceived prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the Mishkan was meant to give external expression to that belief in God. But it was not needed to engender that belief, since God's presence already dwelt on each Jew wherever he was. Since the Mishkan was only to enhance our belief in the same way that Shabbos does, there would at that time have been no conflict between the activities of the Mishkan and Shabbos. Hence, in Parshas Ki Tisa, prior to the sin, the Mishkan precedes Shabbos.

After the sin of the Golden Calf however, the Mishkan was needed for God's presence to rest on the Jewish People. Construction of the Mishkan was no longer an expression of Divine service, but a precondition for that service. As such, the activities of the Mishkan and attendant construction work could no longer be permitted on Shabbos. This is hinted to in the fact that in Parshas Vayakhel, after the Sin of the Golden Calf, the discussion of Shabbos precedes that of the Mishkan, from which we learn that the activities of the Mishkan are prohibited on Shabbos.

* * *

We can now answer a famous question: If the Mishkan was an atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf, why does the command to build the Mishkan in Parshas Trumah precede the account of the sin of the Golden

Calf in Parshas Ki Tisa? The answer is that the Mishkan served two purposes. The first - the actualization of the spiritual strivings of the Jewish people - preceded the sin of the Golden Calf. Only the second purpose - the creation of a dwelling place for the Divine presence - followed the sin of the Golden Calf.

Moses was first told of the Mishkan before the sin of the Golden Calf. At that time, the structure of the Mishkan itself was of secondary importance, and the vessels through which man would actualize his feelings for God were the principal aspect of the Mishkan. Therefore, Moses mentioned the vessels first. The Jews were then far above the natural order of the world in which the house precedes the vessels. They needed no majestic structure to house the holiness of God's Presence.

Betzalel, however, received the command to build the Mishkan after the sin of the Golden Calf. He realized that God's intention now was to create an environment to inspire inner spiritual feelings which would be actualized through the vessels. Betzalel understood what Moses did not - that God's original command was specific in its order because God knew that the Jewish people would sin and require the Mishkan in order to experience His Presence.

The word "Mishkan" is repeated at the beginning of Parshas Pekudei: *"These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of*

witness." The original purpose of the Mishkan (with the definite article) was to enable the Jewish people to express and actualize their inner emotions and beliefs. After the Sin, the Mishkan became the "*Mishkan of witness,*" the place where God's Presence would be felt.

There is an important message here for us. We must not feel hypocritical if we do the mitzvot without the fullest intentions that we know should accompany these activities. As long as we aspire to attain that intention, our actions will bring us to that goal. Also we must remember that even at the height of spiritual inspiration, we must not minimize the importance of the meticulous observance of the physical Mitzvot, for they are the true culmination of those spiritual feelings. Without them, the potential is unrealized.

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