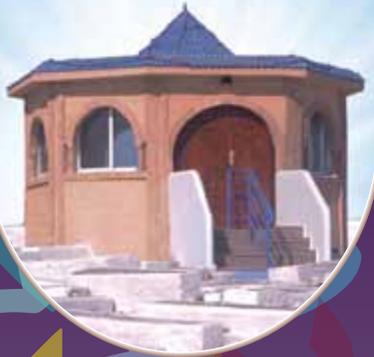


PARSHA VAYAK'HEL PIKUDEI

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THE SANCTITY OF SHABBAT HAS ABSOLUTE PRIORITY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, “Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them, ‘These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a complete rest for Hashem. Whoever does work on it shall be put to death’ ” (Shemot 35:1-2).

Parsha Vayakhel begins with Moshe giving the Children of Israel the commandment to observe Shabbat. True, they had assembled primarily so he could ask them to bring offerings for the construction of the Sanctuary. Nevertheless, the Torah begins by mentioning the prohibition against working on Shabbat, and only then does it mention that Moshe asked the people to bring offerings for the honorable task of building the Sanctuary: “Take from yourselves an offering for Hashem, everyone whose heart motivates him shall bring it, [namely] Hashem’s offering: Gold, silver, copper...” (v.5).

The order in which the Torah describes things is not by chance, but is designed to teach us something. Moshe wanted the Children of Israel to come to the realization that despite having assembled to bring the necessary material for the construction of the Sanctuary, the observance of Shabbat was infinitely more important than the mitzvah of tzeddakah. In fact it is common for people who tread upon the sanctity of Shabbat and cheerfully profane it to donate money in order to justify themselves, even giving generously to the poor. Such people console themselves by thinking that although they don’t observe the sanctity of Shabbat, at least they’re careful to give to tzeddakah, as it is said: “Tzedakah saves from death” (Mishlei 10:2). Hence they are certain that nothing bad will happen to them and that they will not be punished for desecrating Shabbat.

By mentioning the mitzvah of Shabbat, Moshe infused the following message into the heart of the people: Although the mitzvah of tzeddakah is extremely important, and whoever is careful to fulfill it merits a great reward – for as we know, the kabbalist Rabbi Haim Vital (may his merit protect us) wrote that we can lose the merit of any mitzvah due to a transgression (Sha’arei Kedusha 2:7), but the mitzvah of tzeddakah is not offset by any sin – nevertheless the mitzvah of Shabbat is not only not less important than that of tzeddakah, it is even more important, for the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world in six days, and on the seventh He ceased. Hence we must also observe the day on which Hashem ceased His work, and we must sanctify it for Him.

Betzalel received the order to build the Sanctuary, and it is written in our holy books that as he was building it, he had very lofty and profound intentions, his thoughts focused on the mysteries and sacred Names by which the Holy One, blessed be He, created the

universe in six days. As in the Sanctuary, the sacred Names are found within intention, and He prohibited the Children of Israel from working on the Sanctuary during Shabbat in order not to profane the sacred Names that were placed within it.

Not working on the Sanctuary during Shabbat constitutes a proof that although the place of Hashem’s Shechinah was built through the offerings of the Children of Israel, nevertheless we must not work on it during the seventh day, thereby demonstrating that the observance of Shabbat has greater importance than the mitzvah of tzeddakah. This does not diminish the value of tzeddakah, but instead teaches us the gravity of the mitzvah of Shabbat, as well as the extreme attention that we must pay to observing it in every detail.

The Voice of Jacob on Shabbat

Someone who lives with complete faith in Hashem merits that the entire Torah is fulfilled in him, and as we have said, Shabbat is what brings a person to such a level. I have read in the name of the Ben Ish Hai that everyone must make an effort to study Torah on Shabbat. Even if someone skips the study of Torah during the week due to his workload, on Shabbat he cannot use such an excuse, for Shabbat is a day of rest, and even the Holy One, blessed be He, rested from His work of creation on Shabbat. A person must therefore devote some of his time of rest to learning the holy Torah.

We may say that the term vayakhel is composed of two parts: The first part, consisting of the letters vav and yud, has the same numerical value as the word tov (including the word itself), as it is written: “I have given you a lekach tov [good teaching]; do not forsake My Torah” (Mishlei 4:2). The second part, consisting of the letters kuf and lamed, corresponds to the verse: “The voice [kol – kuf lamed] is the voice of Jacob” (Bereshith 27:22). We may therefore say that the voice of Jacob – which is the voice of Torah (described as lekach tov, a “good teaching”) – must resonate and be heard on Shabbat with even greater intensity. The fact that the mitzvah of Shabbat is mentioned in Parsha Vayakhel alludes to this very lofty spiritual concept.

We know that Jerusalem was destroyed because people failed to observe Shabbat (Shabbat 119b). Now at first glance it would seem that the generation that witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem did observe Shabbat. However the criticism made of it was that it failed to study Torah on Shabbat, which is the greatest and purest kind of study. Furthermore, if someone experiences troubles, he should examine his conduct and determine why this has happened to him. If he examines and finds nothing, he should attribute his troubles to a neglect in the study of Torah (Berachot 5a). The worst kind of neglect in this regard occurs on Shabbat, when people have time to study it. Hence we must devote our free time on Shabbat to learning Torah.

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 Under the Direction of
**Rabbi David Hanania
 Pinto Shlita**
CHEVRAT PINTO
 207 West 78th Street
 New York - NY 10024
 Tel: 1 212 721 0230
 www.hevratpinto.org
 hevratpinto@aol.com
 Editor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

The Rest that You Desire

Shabbat is at such an elevated level that we are like angels on this day. In fact every day we recite in kedusha, “We will hallow and adore You as the sweet words of the assembly of the holy Seraphim,” meaning that the Jewish people are not so conceited as to recite kedusha at the same time as the angels, but at the very most they recite it like the angels. During the Musaf prayer of Shabbat, however, we say: “A crown is given to You, Hashem our G-d, by the angels, the supernal multitudes, and by Your people Israel who assemble below.”

The angels and the Jewish people together sanctify Shabbat and the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He. On numerous occasions, our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita has said that it is appropriate to use every moment on Shabbat for a true rest, which is accompanied by the fear of Heaven, “the rest that You desire.” We must completely detach ourselves from profane work, strip ourselves of our soiled garments, and don the veil of majesty. The Holy One, blessed be He, the Judge of the entire world, does not demand more of man than he is capable. If we succeed in elevating the atmosphere of our home, even by the slightest amount, be it a tiny bit, Shabbat will be completely different. Then our souls will sing the song of Shabbat, the day that is a complete rest for the life of the World to Come.

The Power of a Single Word

It is written, “The glory of Hashem filled the Sanctuary” (Shemot 40:35).

Who among us has never seen a person running to a bus stop to catch a bus, which is already waiting there? Yet almost always, he is a few seconds late and the bus departs, leaving him just a few feet from the stop.

The man doesn't give up. He runs after the bus, catching up to it at an intersection where there is a red light. He stubbornly knocks on the door, signaling to the driver to please let him aboard. Because the bus driver is kind, and because he wants to do him a favor, he opens the door.

A Rav in Bnei Brak writes, “I have often noticed that when this passenger boards the bus, he pays his fare and yet forgets to do something: To say ‘thank you’ to the driver!”

We are often confronted by a lack of education. In fact in the above example, the driver acted out of kindness. It is even possible that he broke a regulation, and that he will later have to tell his supervisor why he allowed a passenger to board the bus when not at a bus stop. The reason is that he had genuine compassion for him, and he didn't want to leave him outside, sweating in the oppressive summer heat. In that case, why didn't the passenger wholeheartedly thank him?

Besides the Chillul Hashem which this causes, not saying thank you is also very wrong. “I have seen,” recounts the same Rav, “the driver grinding his teeth in anger, as if to say: ‘It's not worth it to help someone like this.’” All this could have been avoided with

a simple “thank you.” We have not come into this world to act without thinking. Be it in the spiritual or material realm, whoever acts without thinking will not get very far. It is actually our Torah of life that, contrary to other fields of knowledge, teaches us how to think and act, how to guide our steps during our life on earth.

A Simple Hello

The following story comes from an avrech living in Haifa. He recounts that one of his friends, a ba'al teshuvah who also lives in Haifa, fully credits his first step towards the world of Torah to a religious neighbor, a man who always made sure to warmly greet him whenever they met in the stairwell of his apartment building.

The avrech's friend said, “This religious Jew lived on a higher floor, and he was the only observant person in the building. We passed each other every morning as he was returning from synagogue and I was leaving for work. Every day, I was constantly surprised to see the friendly and smiling face which this neighbor presented to me.

“His way of saying hello became even more endearing when I realized that no other neighbor looked at me in such a friendly way, or even said hello! All the neighbors on my floor, even those who lived next to my apartment, never said hello or even smiled at me. He was the only one! One day, I concluded that there was certainly a reason for this.

“It's clear that someone who lives his Torah on a daily basis is rewarded with inner riches that are so vast, he becomes capable of pouring out this excess upon those around him, making them benefit from the authentic joy radiating from inside.

“Some time later, I reached the undeniable conclusion that if I yearn for life – for true life – then I have to return to Torah observance, and that's exactly what I did.” Such is the power of a simple hello! Let's weigh the costs and benefits involved: How much did it cost this man to say hello every morning? Did he have to empty out his bank account for it? No, clearly not. He just paid a little attention to someone, and there you have it – an entire family (parents, children, and the following generations) who are observant and close to the Creator – and all because of a simple hello from a single individual. Not a small thing, is it?

Guard Your Tongue

Plugging Your Ears

If a person finds himself among a group of individuals who have begun to speak forbidden things, and he believes that reprimanding them will be completely useless, then he must leave if possible or put his fingers in his ears, which will be a great mitzvah on his part. If it is impossible to leave, and if he feels that plugging his ears is equally difficult because he will be ridiculed, he should at least find the strength within himself to fight his evil inclination by not succumbing to the sin of heeding and believing Lashon Harah.

– Chafetz Chaim

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Zeal in the Performance of Mitzvot

It is written, “And the leaders brought the shoham stones” (Shemot 35:27).

Rabbi Nathan asked, “Why were the tribal leaders the first to give for the inauguration of the altar, and yet for the construction of the Sanctuary they were not the first?” This is what they said, “Let the community give what it wants to give, and we will supply what is lacking.” Since the community gave everything that was required – as it is written: “The materials were enough for all the work, and more” (Shemot 36:7) – they thought: “What shall we bring?” Hence they brought the shoham stones. Since they initially demonstrated little zeal, there is a letter missing in their name, for the term *vehanesi'im* (“and the leaders”) is written without the letter *yud* (Rashi). Conversely, what is said about the community? “They continued to bring him [Moshe] free-willed gifts every morning [literally, ‘by morning, by morning’]” (Shemot 36:3). The Chatam Sofer compares what the Sages have said on the verse, “that which remains of it until morning” (Shemot 12:10) – namely that it consists of the “morning of the morning,” the very first rays of dawn – with what is alluded to here, meaning that the Children of Israel brought their offerings with zeal “by morning, by morning,” i.e., as soon as the first rays of dawn appeared. However they did not bring their offerings on the night before, since zeal for mitzvot applies only from the morning, as we find in regards to circumcision, which we learn from the words: “Abraham rose early in the morning.”

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz Zatzal gave a wonderful testimonial in this regard (found in the book *Da'at Torah*): “Anyone who knew the Kohen Gadol of our time, Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen Zatzal, the author of *Chafetz Chaim*, realized that he never discussed how he would go and perform a mitzvah. People never heard him say things such as, ‘I will do such-and-such,’ for he would do things before even mentioning them. Thus, for example, when someone asked him for a letter of approbation, even before answering him verbally, he was already writing the letter. He would then tell the person who made the request: ‘Here is your letter. It is ready.’”

Return Home Immediately!

What follows is another story regarding the deep insight of the *tzaddikim*, who “speak little and do much.” Rabbi Eizik Zatzal once went to visit his brother, the Rabbi Dovid of Lelov Zatzal, the Rebbe of Lelov. Rabbi Dovid addressed him after a few minutes and said, “It’s not very polite to tell a guest to return home, but I must tell you: Return home immediately!” Rabbi Eizik was very frightened, for a thought crossed his mind: “Who knows what could have happened at home? Perhaps there was some catastrophe, which is why my brother is sending me home in such a hurry!”

Needless to say, Rabbi Eizik did not walk back home, but ran! He hurried as quickly as he could, but when he made it back, he discovered that everyone in his family was alright. He then thanked the Creator for His kindness, but at the same time was puzzled by his brother’s remark. Why had he told him to return home so quickly? He was still thinking about this when the door to his home suddenly flung open, and a Jew he didn’t know stumbled inside and fainted. Rabbi Eizik immediately ran to pick him up, and then placed him on

a bed and helped him to recover. When the man regained consciousness, Rabbi Eizik asked him what happened, and he said: “Today my son is eight days old. I ran everywhere looking for a mohel, and yet everywhere I went I was told, ‘This one is away on a journey’ or ‘This one isn’t home,’ and so on. I thought that I was going to lose my mind, for how can a circumcision not take place on time? I continued looking, going from village to village in search of a mohel, until I arrived here. I ran all along my journeys, which left me completely drained, and that’s why I fainted!” Without saying a word, Rabbi Eizik hurried to take a knife for circumcision, and then left with this Jew for his home. They arrived before sunset, and Rabbi Eizik brought the baby into the covenant of Abraham on the proper day. It was only then that Rabbi Eizik understood why his brother had sent him back home with such urgency.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Term ‘Al’ – Spiritual Growth and Greatness

It is written, “The men came al [with] the women. Everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, earrings, rings, body ornaments – all kinds of gold ornaments – every man who raised up an offering of gold to Hashem” (Shemot 35:22).

This verse deals with the donations that the Children of Israel brought to the Sanctuary. Why does it say, “The men came al [with] the women” rather than, “the men and the women came”? In reality, the Sanctuary was meant to atone for the sin of the golden calf, a sin which only the men had to rectify, since they were the only ones responsible for it.

The women had no part in this sin (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 45). Thus in order to be forgiven and rectify their sin, the men yearned to participate in the construction of the Sanctuary more than the women. Hence they brought their offerings with even greater zeal, something that we learn from the phrase: “The men came with the women.” Given the fact that it was the men who committed the sin of the golden calf, it was incumbent upon them to quickly build the Sanctuary in order to return to the spiritual level that they once occupied, but then lost. As for the women, they brought their offerings for the sake of the mitzvah alone, something evident in the very letters of the terms *ha-nashim* (“the women”) and *ha-anashim* (“the men”). The letter *aleph*, which only appears in the term *ha-anashim*, refers to the Sovereign (*Aluph*) of the universe, namely Hashem. This indicates that in making the golden calf, the men sinned before Hashem. Furthermore, we should underline that in contrast to women, men are obligated to study Torah. Now it is a well-known fact that “one who is commanded and fulfills [the command] is greater than one who fulfills it, though not commanded” (*Kiddushin* 31a). When a person has been given a Divine command, the evil inclination cleaves to him in an attempt to prevent him from fulfilling G-d’s will. Hence for a person to conquer his evil inclination and fulfill Hashem’s command as should be, he needs to invest more energy and demonstrate even greater zeal.

This is why the men, who were obligated to bring an offering for the construction of the Sanctuary, had to act with extra zeal in order to fulfill their obligation. Hence it is stated that the men “came al [with] the women” – the term *al* alluding to spiritual growth and greatness. It means that in order to grow spiritually, men need a greater impetus than women.

Restoring Unity

It is written, “Moshe gathered the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (Shemot 35:1).

The Children of Israel were united at the giving of the Torah at Sinai, as it is written: “Israel encamped there, before the mountain” (Shemot 19:2). Here the Sages explain that they were like “a single man, with a single heart.” However this unity unraveled after the sin of the golden calf, and the Satan (the accuser) stirred up dissension and strife among the tribes of Israel.

In his book *Eretz Chemda*, the Malbim explains: “As we know, the building of the Sanctuary was meant, among other things, to atone for the sin of the golden calf committed by Israel. Thus Moshe put an effort into gathering ‘the entire assembly of the Children of Israel’ to speak to them about the work of the Sanctuary. In doing so, he wanted to restore Israel’s former splendor and unity, as it had existed at the giving of the Torah.”

Nothing More

It is written, “Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded” (Shemot 35:10).

In his book *Pardes Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Patsanovski explains this verse in the following way:

The greatest wisdom consists of not being more intelligent than necessary. We must constantly strive to fulfill Hashem’s command with the greatest of fidelity, without removing or adding to it, for every deed must be fulfilled exactly according to His instructions.

This is what the verse is alluding to by saying, “Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded” – everything that Hashem has commanded, nothing more.

Rebuilding the Temple

It is written, “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary...which were counted at Moshe’s command” (Shemot 38:21).

When the prophet Jeremiah asked, “Why did the land perish?” Hashem replied: “Because they have forsaken My Torah” (Jeremiah 9:11-12). That is, the destruction of the Temple was caused primarily by the Torah being forsaken. Hence G-d says through the prophet Malachi, “Remember the Torah of My servant Moshe.... Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet” (Malachi 3:22-23). In other words: If you are careful to remember the Torah of My servant Moshe, you will be worthy of being immediately delivered.

The author of *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* states that this is what the Torah is telling us here: “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary – this is how the Sanctuary may be used and preserved; at Moshe’s command – by the Jewish people remembering the Torah of Moshe.” The Temple was destroyed when the Torah was forsaken, and therefore the Temple can be rebuilt when we return to the Torah.

Deserving of a Blessing

It is written, “Moshe saw all the work.... And Moshe blessed them” (Shemot 39:43).

“Moshe saw” – what did he see? He saw the angels that had been created by the mitzvot performed by the Children of Israel when they brought their offerings to the Sanctuary, since a person who performs a mitzvah acquires an angel that will defend him. The Children of Israel attained a very high level of spiritual perfection, and Moshe realized that this mitzvah had been carried out wholeheartedly, just as Hashem had commanded, with extremely pure and sacred intentions. That is why he blessed them. – *Birkat Shamayim*

Blessings from Above

It is written, “The silver of those who were counted of the community” (Shemot 38:25).

Rabbi Yitzchak put the following question to Rabbi Shimon: “Seeing that, as we have learned, no blessing dwells in whatever is numbered or measured, why were all things connected with the Sanctuary made to be numbered?”

Rabbi Shimon replied, “Wherever holiness abides, if the act of numbering proceeds from the side of holiness, blessing will abide continuously and not pass away. This we learn from the tithe, which is a cause of blessing, the reason being that the act of counting is performed for a sacred purpose. How much more so, then, should this be with the Sanctuary, which was a sacred edifice and derived from the side of holiness! Yet not so with worldly matters, things that are not derived from the side of holiness; no blessing rests upon them if they are numbered. For then the ‘other side’ – that is, the evil eye – may obtain dominion over them. And wherever the evil eye rules, blessings cannot reach. In matters of holiness, on the other hand, blessings continuously increase through measuring and numbering.

“Hence, ‘The silver of those who were counted of the community’ – indeed, ‘counted’ without fear of the evil eye, and without fear of any evil consequences, as the blessings from above rested upon everything there.”

– Zohar II:225a

Men of Faith

Go Take a Walk Outside

Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, would usually go to synagogue every night to recite tikkun chatzot. One night, as the Rav arrived in synagogue to pray, he met a man on the stairs whose body was afflicted by a condition that left him unable to walk. Indeed, he could only crawl on all fours, unable to even stand.

“What are you doing here?” asked Rabbi Haim. “Get up and walk outside like everyone else!” The man responded in a tearful voice, saying that he was disabled, which is precisely why he was there. “I am asking you to pray for me. Please ask, by the merit of your holy fathers, that I should recover from the terrible illness that has struck me.”

Rabbi Haim invited the man to recite tikkun chatzot with him, and afterwards he would see what he could do to help.

After reciting tikkun chatzot, Rabbi Haim summoned several people and asked them to carry this disabled Jew to the cemetery. That was where Rabbi Haim’s grandfather was buried, the holy tzaddik and kabbalist Rabbi Haim Hagadol, may his merit protect us.

When they arrived at the cemetery, Rabbi Haim approached his grandfather’s grave and began to weep and cry out: “Grandfather, grandfather, pray to Hashem for this man! Neither he nor I will move from here until he has been cured of his illness.”

As Rabbi Haim was praying and imploring G-d, the disabled man began to experience painful sensations in his body, and after a few minutes he stood up and began to walk normally.

Later on, this man was fortunate enough to get married and have children. He told his entire family about the miracle that he experienced by the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, and by the merit of his grandfather, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol.

– Recounted by Rabbi Hillel ben Haim, who lived in Beersheba and served in Rabbi Haim Pinto’s synagogue