



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ד Pekudei Parshat

March 12, 2024

By: Rabbi Avi Cohen

Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

This week's portion begins by telling us (Exodus 38:21) that Moshe gave a reckoning of all the gold, silver, and brass that was used in the Mishkan's (Tabernacle) construction.

(כא) אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר פָּקַד עַל פִּי מֹשֶׁה

These are the reckonings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding.

What lies behind this accounting? Why was it necessary to total the elements that went into the Mishkan's construction? Who needed to know, and what difference did it make?

The Midrash (Rabba 51:6) reveals a startling answer to these questions.

ולמה עשה עמהם חשבון? הקב"ה יתברך שמו מאמינו שנא' (במדבר יב) לא כן עבדי משה בכל ביתי נאמן הוא ולמה אמר להם משה בואו ונעסוק במשכן ונחשב לפניכם אלא ששמע משה ליצני ישראל מדברים מאחריו שנאמר (שמות לג) והיה כבוא משה האהלה ירד עמוד הענן ועמד פתח האהל ודבר עם משה (שם) והביטו אחרי משה ומה היו אומרים ר' יוחנן אמר אשרי יולדתו של זה ומה היא רואה בו כל ימיו הקב"ה מדבר עמו כל ימיו הוא מושלם להקב"ה זהו והביטו אחרי משה ר' חמא אמר היו אומרים חמי קדל דבריה דעמרם וחבירו אומר לו אדם ששלט על מלאכת המשכן אין אתה מבקש שיהא עשיר כששמע משה כך א"ל משה חייכם נגמר המשכן אתן לכם חשבון אמר להם בואו ונעשה חשבון הוי ואלה פקודי המשכן

Why did Moshe give them an accounting? Hashem trusted Moshe, as it says, "Moshe is trustworthy in my whole house." So why did Moshe say to them, "come and I will give you an exact account of what was used?" Because Moshe heard the "scoffers" of Israel speaking behind his back. R' Chama says they were saying, "A person who was in charge of the Mishkan's work, you don't think he's going to wind up being rich?" [In other words, Moshe probably got rich by stealing from the donations

brought for the Mishkan.] When Moshe heard this, he said, “Now that the Mishkan is done, come I will give you an exact account of what was done with the money!”

How absurd! Moshe, Hashem’s trusted servant, would steal? What kind of person could think so low a thought about such a holy man?

The answer is, a “letz” (ץל) translated above as a “scoffer.” These lowly fellows seek to tear down every worthy person, institution, or endeavor through mockery and ridicule in an effort to bring them down to their low level. This way, they can continue to feel at ease with themselves and not have to explain to themselves why they are such scumbags. “What do you mean? Everyone is like us! There are no good people in the world. They are all fakers and actors.”

And, yes, a “letz” could even suspect a holy man like Moshe Rabbeinu, about whom Hashem testified, “He is trustworthy in any area,” of theft. This is why our Sages caution us against any association with a “letz”. Nothing is beyond their reach. Even the holiest, most humble man in the entire history of the world, they can tear down and render a common thief. This is the power of ridicule and mockery, and anyone who hears it cannot help but be affected by it to some degree.

Their methodology is to manipulate the information to make it look incriminating, and then create from it absurd allegations. The common man doesn’t perceive the factual manipulation and thus has little reason to challenge the ridiculous claim.

On what basis did the scoffers accuse Moshe of getting rich on the donations to the Mishkan?

Rav Yosef Tzvi Salant זצ”ל in his book באר יוסף explains.

Before the Jewish people left Egypt, Hashem told them to take the Egyptian peoples' gold and silver, the rationale being that He had promised Avraham Avinu that after the slavery the Jewish people would leave Egypt with great wealth. Hashem said, "I don't want Avraham to complain that I did a great job on the slavery but that as far as the promise of great wealth, I didn't come through! So please have them take the Egyptians' money."

But while the Jewish people were engaged in emptying Egypt of all its money, Moshe was busy looking for Yosef's coffin. Yosef asked the Jewish people to take his bones out of Egypt when they leave, and Moshe took it upon himself to locate and exhume Yosef's bones. Thus, Moshe took no money from the Egyptians. Moshe also took none of the spoils that surfaced on the shore of the Reed Sea after the Egyptians were drowned. He was not in it for the money.

Yom Kippur was the day on which Moshe came down from Mount Sinai with the second set of Tablets. The next day he commanded the Jewish people to start bringing the materials necessary for the Mishkan. At this point some people noticed that Moshe appeared wealthy but they couldn't understand how. Since he had not partaken of the Egyptian spoils, how did he become so wealthy, so quickly? Even though such a proposition meant accusing Moshe of being a common thief, something that should not have been a possibility in anyone's mind, the "*letztes*" came to this preposterous conclusion.

Little did they know that his wealth came from the broken set of the first tablets that were made of sapphire. Hashem gave them to Moshe as a present and through them he became wealthy. Unaware of this, the only conclusion they could reach is that he was pilfering from the gold and silver brought for the Mishkan. In any case, they should have realized that there must be another explanation for Moshe's

wealth, because it is impossible to conceive that he would steal. But this is where “ליצנות” (the art of mockery and ridicule) comes in. Just a flippant statement, like – “Oh, I’ll tell you where his wealth came from! He took it from the donations to the Mishkan! Ha ha ha,” is all it takes. Immediately, Moshe is no longer holy and untouchable to the people; he has been verbally degraded to the level of a common thief.

Our Sages tell us that Korach used this same tactic to create his rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. Beginning with a few seeming legitimate questions whose answers were designed to make Moshe look foolish, he proceeded to ridicule and mock Moshe, tearing him down and making him someone who could be argued with.

Despite the absurdity of the claim and Moshe’s impeccable integrity, as testified to by Hashem Himself, Moshe took the accusation seriously, and said, “*Now that the Mishkan is done, come and I will give you an exact accounting of what was done with the money!*” Moshe realized that the power of ליצנות – mockery - is so dangerous that he felt it necessary to dispel it.

We find that Hashem also took action to counteract the allegations of scoffers. In the first verse of Parshat Toldot (Genesis 25:19) we read:

(יט) וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק

19) *And these are the offspring of Yitzchak, Avraham fathered Yitzchak.*

Rashi in his commentary on this verse explains why Hashem told us, here, that Avraham fathered Yitzchak.

לפי שהיו ליצני הדור אומרים מאבימלך נתעברה שרה! שהרי כמה שנים שהתה עם אברהם ולא נתעברה הימנו מה עשה הקב"ה צר קלסתר פניו של יצחק דומה לאברהם והעידו הכל אברהם הוליד את יצחק וזהו שכתב כאן יצחק בן אברהם היה שהרי עדות יש שאברהם הוליד את יצחק

Because the scoffers of the generation were saying that Sarah had become pregnant from Avimelech (who tried to take Sarah for a wife, but never touched her)! After all, she had lived with Avraham for so many years and never conceived a child. What did Hashem do? He made Yitzchak's face look just like Avraham's face so that all could see that, indeed, "Avraham fathered Yitzchak!" This is why the Torah tells us here that Yitzchak was Avraham's son, because all could clearly see it.

We see again the danger of "scoffers." Even Hashem took measures to ensure that the misinformation of the scoffers not take hold.

Another concept applies here. The verse in Numbers (32:22) says:

וְהֵייתֶם נְקִיִּים מִיְדֹן וּמִשְׂרָאֵל

22) And you shall be blameless from Hashem and Israel.

The Sages derive from here that a person should always operate aboveboard, and not allow any opportunity for suspicion to creep into his deeds.

Here are some examples.

תניא, גבאי צדקה שאין להם עניים לחלק פורטין מעותיהם לאחרים ואין פורטין לעצמן

We learned: Someone in charge of collecting and distributing charity... is allowed to give change from charity's money to others but not to himself. (People may say he is giving himself a better exchange rate)

וגבאי תמחוי שאין להם עניים לחלק מוכרין לאחרים ואין מוכרים לעצמן משום שנאמר והייתם נקיים מה' ומישראל [פסחים י"ג א']

One who oversees giving food to the needy may sell the excess food to others, but not to himself.

ת"ר, בית גרמו היו בקיאין במעשה לחם הפנים תורה תמימה על במדבר פרק לב פסוק ומעולם לא נמצאה פת נקיה ביד בניהם שלא יאמרו ממעשה לחם הפנים נזונים, לקיים מה שנאמר והייתם נקיים מה' ומישראל

The Rabbis taught: The house of Garmu, who were in charge of the showbread in the Holy Temple, never had white flour in their homes. They always had whole wheat flour, which was invalid for the showbread. This was so that no one would suspect them of taking flour from the Holy Temple.

ת"ר, בית אבטינס היו בקיאין במעשה הקטורת, ומעולם לא יצאה כלה מבושמת מבתיהן, וכשהיו נושאים אשה ממקום אחר היו מתניין עמה שלא תתבשם, שלא יאמרו ממעשה הקטורת מתבשמינן, לקיים מה שנאמר והייתם נקיים מה' ומישראל

The Rabbis taught: The house of Avtinus was in charge of the incense in the Holy Temple, but never did anyone from that family leave their house wearing perfume. Even when they married a woman from another city, they made a condition with her that she is never allowed to wear any perfume. This way, no one could say they are using the incense from the Holy Temple to make themselves smell nice.

There is a great lesson here. One may think to say, "I know that I am innocent and that I would never use the incense from the Holy Temple for myself! Let people think what they want, I can't control their minds. As long as Hashem knows I am clean, that is all that matters."

We see that this type of thinking is wrong. One must conduct his affairs in a way that there is no opportunity for someone to suspect him of any wrongdoing. Perhaps the reason for this is because there are always "letztes" out there who are just waiting for the opportunity to tear down someone good and accuse him of wrongdoing no matter how honest and noble he is. Is there anyone greater than Moshe Rabbeinu? And they suspected him! The letz wants nothing good and sacred to exist so that he can feel good about the low life that he is.

There is another very important lesson for all of us here. When a *letz* confronts us with “evidence” that so and so has done something wrong, we need to run away from him as fast as possible. He is nothing but a troublemaker and we have no business suspecting upstanding members of our community of wrongdoing based on the lowly accusations of a *letz*. We must recognize the “*letz*” for what he is and not give any credence to his claims. Such people are capable of calling even Moshe Rabbeinu a thief.

Pekudei is the last portion in the book of Shemot, Exodus, and its final verse (40:38) reveals that the freedom from Egyptian slavery has finally reached its purpose.

(לח) כִּי עָנָן יִדְוֹד עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל מִסְעֵיהֶם

38) For the cloud of Hashem would be on the Mishkan (Tabernacle) by day, and fire would be on it at night, before the eyes of all of the House of Israel throughout their journeys.

After telling us that Bereshit is the book of Creation for both the world and the Jewish nation, Nachmanides in his preface to the book of Exodus tells us:

ונתיחד ספר ואלה שמות בענין הגלות הראשון הנגזר בפירוש (בראשית טו יג) ובגאולה ממנו,

And the book of Shemot focuses on the first exile which was explicitly decreed (Genesis 15:13), and the redemption from it.

והנה הגלות איננו נשלם עד יום שובם אל מקומם ואל מעלת אבותם ישובו - וכשיצאו ממצרים אף על פי שיצאו מבית עבדים עדיין יחשבו גולים, כי היו בארץ לא להם

נבוכים במדבר, וכשבאו אל הר סיני ועשו המשכן ושב הקדוש ברוך הוא והשרה שכינתו ביניהם אז שבו אל מעלת אבותם, שהיה סוד אלוה עלי אהליהם, והם הם המרכבה (ב"ר מז ח), ואז נחשבו גאולים ולכן נשלם הספר הזה בהשלימו ענין המשכן ובהיות כבוד ה' מלא אותו תמיד

*However, the exile was not finished until the Jewish people had returned to their original standing – the state of perfection of the Forefathers. Although they were freed from the Egyptian slavery, they were not yet considered redeemed because they were not in their own land and were still wandering in the wilderness. But after they received the Torah on Mount Sinai and then built the Tabernacle, Hashem returned **His Divine Presence** - שכינה (Shechina) to dwell among them. This constituted the return to the state of the forefathers' perfection, when the שכינה – Hashem's Divine Presence - dwelled upon their tents. As the Sages say, "the Forefathers were Hashem's chariot (dwelling place) ." Only then, were they considered redeemed. Therefore, the book (of Exodus) concludes with the completion of the Tabernacle's construction, with the Divine Presence dwelling there permanently.*

The Tabernacle created a permanent presence for Hashem within the Jewish people, and, with that, we returned to the state of perfection of the Forefathers who, through the holy lives, which they lived in service of Hashem, had become the "chariot" -the resting place for Hashem's שכינה (Shechina). Only in that state were we considered redeemed.

The Ramban's commentary here contains a subtle, yet profound, hidden idea.

Redemption - liberation for a Jew - is only achieved when he is with the Shechina (presence) of Hashem. That is the Jew's default position, which liberates him from all the decoys and enticements that seek to lure him away from his purpose in this world. By remaining focused and loyal to the commandments in the Torah, he steers himself

clear of all the erroneous paths that lead nowhere in life. Hence, it is only through staying close to the *Shechina* that he will be able to express his uniqueness and purpose in this world.

Now that we don't have the Mishkan or either of the Holy Temples, how are we to stay close to the *Shechina*? In what context can we still feel liberated?

Our Sages teach us: Where did the *Shechina* from the Holy Temple go after it was destroyed? It was dispersed among the Shuls and Torah study halls. Hence, one can remain close to the *Shechina* by attending services in a Shul or by studying Torah.

Indeed, the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (3:6) says:

(ו) רַבִּי חֲלַפְתָּא בֶּן דּוֹסָא אִישׁ כָּפַר חֲנֻנְיָהּ אוֹמֵר, עֲשֶׂרָה שְׂיוֹשְׁבֵינָא וְעוֹסְקִין בִּתְוֵרָה, שְׂכִינָה שְׂרוּיָה בֵּינֵיהֶם, שְׁנַאֲמַר (תהלים פב), אֱלֹהִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדֹת אֵל. וּמִנִּין אֶפְלוּ חֲמִשָּׁה, שְׁנַאֲמַר (עמוס ט), וְאֶגְדָּתוֹ עַל אֶרֶץ יִסְדָּה. וּמִנִּין אֶפְלוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה, שְׁנַאֲמַר (תהלים פב), בְּקִרְבֵי אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט. וּמִנִּין אֶפְלוּ שְׁנַיִם, שְׁנַאֲמַר (מלאכי ג), אִזְ נִדְבְּרוּ יִרְאִי ה' אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשֹׁב ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע וְגו'. וּמִנִּין אֶפְלוּ אֶחָד, שְׁנַאֲמַר (שמות כ), בְּכֹל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲזַכִּיר אֶת שְׁמִי אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וַיְבָרְכֶיךָ

Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa from Kfar Chanania says: Ten people studying Torah together, Hashem's Shechina is with them as it says in the verse... The same is true with even five, as it says... and so it is with three, as it says... and how do we know that (the Shechina is with) even two people? Because it says in the verse, (Malachi 3:16) Then those who fear Hashem spoke to one another, and Hashem listened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Hashem and for those who give thought to His Name. And how do we know even one person? For it says (Exodus 20:21), "Wherever I permit My Name to be mentioned I shall come to you and bless you."

The obvious question on the Mishnah is if when even one person studies Torah the Shechina resides with him, of course that would be true if more than one study Torah. Why would the Mishna have to speak about five or ten? The Sages answer that it is to tell us that there is more Shechina with more people.

The other place where the Shechina dwells and that we can easily access is a Jewish home.

The Talmud (Sota 17a) teaches us.

דריש ר"ע איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהן לא זכו אש אוכלתן

Rabbi Akiva taught: A man and a woman, if they are meritorious, the Shechina dwells among them, but if they are not, fire consumes them.

Rabbi Akiva's statement is like a play on words. The Hebrew word for man is איש and the Hebrew word for woman is אשה. The letters א and ש which spell אש - fire, are common to both. The letter י in the word איש and the letter ה in the word אשה change the word to man and woman respectively. The letters י and ה together spell Hashem's name.

Rabbi Akiva teaches us that if the basis of a man and a woman joining in marriage is to build a home based on the Torah's teachings, Hashem's Shechina will dwell there with them. If, however, they remove Hashem's name from their marriage, they will be left with just the two letters that spell fire אש, and fire will consume the marriage.

Each of these institutions must be fortresses of holiness that keep out foreign influences that can dilute and adulterate the Holy Torah. For Hashem's Torah to bring the Shechina, the Torah must be pure, or Hashem will have nothing to do with it. When pure and holy, these institutions are the places where a Jew is liberated from the incompatible morals and values that seek to infiltrate and corrupt him.

In this final portion in the Book of Exodus, we are exposed to the highs and lows of the human being. On the one hand, a person can bring the Shechina into the world and into himself by studying Torah, but, on the other hand, a person can sink to the lowest level to the extent of accusing even the holiest man of lowly conduct. The freedom to choose is in our hands. The Torah commands us to choose life!