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תשפ"ה Parshat Vayakhel
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Parshat Vayakhel תשפ"ה

This week's portion *Vayakhel* follows on the heels of Parshat *Ki Tisa*, the portion that relates the story of the golden calf. A brief overview of the events leading up to where we are now will give us a greater understanding of what *Vayakhel* is about.

After Moshe smashed the tablets and dealt with the sinners, he went back up the mountain for another 40 days to beseech Hashem to forgive the Jewish people for their very grievous sin. Moshe succeeded, and after 40 days returned to the Jewish people with the amazing news that Hashem had forgiven them and that Hashem would give them a second set of tablets. The next day Moshe went up the mountain for a third set of 40 days (the first was to receive the first set of tablets) and returned on the 10th of Tishrei, Yom Kippur, with the second set.

Our portion begins the day after Yom Kippur, as Moshe gathers the Bnai Yisrael to give them the new instructions from Hashem (Exodus 35:1):

וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עֵדֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
יְדֹד לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲתֶם

1) *Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Bnai Yisrael and said to them: "These are the **things** that Hashem commanded to do them."*

What are the **things** of which Moshe is speaking? Our Sages teach us that Moshe was gathering the people to tell them that Hashem had commanded them to build a Mishkan, a sanctuary for His presence in this world. This was something very new. Had the Jewish people retained the high spiritual level they were on at Mount Sinai they would not have needed a physical structure as a sanctuary for Hashem's Shechina. Each holy person would have been a mini sanctuary, a suitable place for Hashem's Shechina to reside. But now that they had fallen from that exalted level, no longer worthy of hosting Hashem's Shechina, a Mishkan had to be built.

This was exciting news! Having a Mishkan where Hashem's presence would dwell would enable them to remain connected (or, better, to reconnect after the golden calf) to the Divine revelation that they had experienced on Mount Sinai. They would have in their midst a living representation of what they witnessed on Sinai: Hashem's continuous presence among them.

Moshe also told the Bnai Yisroel that the Mishkan and all of its components would be constructed of materials that they would donate. They were excited about this also because with this they could atone for the sin of the golden calf by giving their gold and silver to a holy cause.

There is something peculiar here, though. Before giving the detailed and elaborate instructions for the Mishkan, Moshe interrupted with a seemingly unrelated topic, Shabbat.

Here is verse 2.

(ב) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבַּת
שַׁבְּתוֹן לַיהוָה כָּל הָעֲשֵׂה בּוֹ מְלָאכָה יוּמָת

2) *“On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; Whoever does work on the seventh day shall be put to death.”*

Why is Shabbat placed ahead of the instructions for the Mishkan?

The Sages explain the lesson: although the construction of the sanctuary for Hashem’s Shechina is an extremely important endeavor, it does not override the laws of Shabbat. They are not to build the Mishkan on Shabbat.

Moreover, there is a very deep connection between the Mishkan and Shabbat, which is hinted to in this Midrash (Tanchuma Pikudei 3):

כתיב ה' בחכמה יסד ארץ וגוי' (משלי ג) ואומר ואמלא אותו רוח אלהים
בחכמה (שמות לא) ללמדך שהמשכן שקול כנגד כל העולם וכנגד יצירת
האדם שהוא עולם קטן

The verse (Proverbs 3:19) informs us, Hashem established the world with חכמה - wisdom. And as to Betzalel (the one

who crafted the Tabernacle) it also says (Exodus 31:3) And I filled him with חכמה - wisdom. This (the use of the word wisdom in both places) teaches us that **the Tabernacle is considered like the entire (miniature) world** and it also corresponds to the creation of man who is also considered a miniature world.

This corresponds to the Talmud's statement (Brachot 55a):

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, יודע היה בצלאל לצרף אותיות שנבראו בהן שמים וארץ

Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, "Betzael knew how to put together the letters (of the Hebrew alphabet in the same configurations that Hashem did) when Hashem said the words that brought the creation into being."

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (5:1) informs us that Hashem created the world with ten pronouncements (i.e., words).

א) בַּעֲשָׂרָה מֵאֲמֵרוֹת נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם

This refers to the words that Hashem used to create the world at the beginning of Genesis: "And Hashem said, 'Let there be light!' and there was light. 'And Hashem said ...' Betzael knew the exact combinations of letters and words that Hashem used to create the world; and when crafting the Tabernacle, Betzael employed those very same pronouncements. Hence, through its creation, the Tabernacle contained, in a sense, the same components

present in the world. Furthermore, each component of the Tabernacle is spiritually linked to a specific component of the world – the one that shares the same pronouncement. Thus, the Tabernacle was a miniature world. This is the reason for all the attention to the Tabernacle's construction. A whole new world was being created here!

The same Midrash tells us that man is also a miniature world. This means that man contains within him a component that corresponds to the Mishkan, and, subsequently, to the entire world.

When the miniature world of a man with his holy thoughts and actions performs the service in the Mishkan, holiness is broadcast to every corresponding component in the world. In this way, the entire world receives its blessing and its life from the holy service in the Mishkan.

The daily service that went on in the Tabernacle and subsequently in the Holy Temple, as delineated in the Torah, was precise. For example, the two daily sacrifices, morning and evening, were brought from the donations of the Jewish people, for the Jewish people, with the sacrifice's respective accoutrements. The Menorah was lit every evening and had to burn through the night, and incense was brought on the special incense altar every morning and evening. The showbread was put on the Shulchan every Shabbat, replacing

the twelve loaves that were there from the previous Shabbat. Each of these holy services was the source of blessing to the component in the world to which it corresponded. For example, the amount of “bread” or food in the world, received its blessing from the service of the showbread, which took place on Shabbat. This symbolizes that although we don’t work on Shabbat, Shabbat is the source of blessing for our livelihood for the rest of the week. The amount of wisdom in the world received its blessing from the lighting of the menorah, whose seven arms represented the seven branches of wisdom.

In a way, the Tabernacle was like a *remote - control device* that controlled the blessing in the entire world. The Cohanim doing the appropriate act in the Tabernacle – *pressing the right button*, so to speak – would create a burst of holiness that would travel heavenward and return to the world in the form of blessing to the part of the world to which it was linked.

Not only did the Tabernacle service serve as the source of blessing to the world, the blessing returned to the world and was distributed throughout it through the Tabernacle as well. The Sages describe the Tabernacle as the world’s “umbilical cord.” From it, the stimulus for the blessing was

created, and then, back through it came the blessing - the nourishment and sustenance to the world.

To illustrate this our Sages teach us that in Jerusalem, King Solomon was able to plant even the most exotic fruits needing specific tropical climates because he could identify the exact spot that the spiritual blessing for that fruit descended from heaven through Jerusalem on the way to the Tropics.

This leads to an important question. Now that we no longer have the Temple service, what provides blessing to the world? What has replaced the sacrifices and other sources of holiness that brought forth the blessing from heaven?

This is where our daily prayers come in. The morning prayer שחרית - *Shacharit*, was instituted as a replacement for the daily morning sacrifice. The afternoon prayer מנחה - *Mincha*, came as a replacement for the afternoon daily sacrifice. And ערבית - *Maariv*, the evening prayer, corresponds to the meat of the sacrifices that burned on the altar throughout the night. Although they do not compare to the holiness generated in the Holy Temple, our prayers suffice to get us by. And as you can imagine, the more the better.

This is why we face Jerusalem when we pray. The *Code of Jewish Law* actually states that we should not only direct our prayers to Jerusalem, we should direct them to the place of

the Holy Temple, and, indeed, to the Holy of Holies in the Holy Temple. This is because despite our prayers having replaced the temple service, the site of the Holy Temple is still the conduit for our prayers to reach Hashem and provides the source of blessing to the world.

Invoking this concept that the Tabernacle and Holy Temple were miniature worlds linked to the greater world, we can begin to understand the deep connection between the Mishkan and Shabbat.

Similar to the opening verses of our parsha, the Torah tells us (Leviticus 19:30):

ל) אֶת שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ אֲנִי יְדֹנֵד

30) Keep My Sabbath, and fear My Holy Temple, I am Hashem.

The Sages wonder about the juxtaposition of the Shabbat and the Holy Temple. What does keeping the Shabbat have to do with the Temple? Why are these two seemingly unrelated topics placed in the same verse?

Rashi explains:

ואע"פ שאני מזהירכם על המקדש את שבתותי תשמורו אין בנין בית המקדש דוחה שבת.

Even though I have warned you about the sanctity of the Holy Temple, nevertheless keep my Shabbat. This teaches us that the construction of the Tabernacle and Holy Temple do not

override the Shabbat, and you may not construct them on Shabbat.

We find an even deeper lesson here. On 12 separate occasions the Torah directs us to keep the Shabbat. Keeping the Shabbat means that we refrain from doing מלאכה (*melacha*.) (I am deliberately not translating that word, commonly understood as “*work*.” See below.) But the Torah doesn’t spell out for us what acts constitute a violation of the Shabbat. There is just one verse (Exodus 35:3), which clearly states, “*Do not burn a fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.*” But Shabbat contains 39 different categories of forbidden acts. Where do the other 38 come from?

They derive from the verse quoted above. *Fear my Sanctuary, and keep My Shabbat.* The way to keep my Shabbat is by refraining from doing the constructive actions that you employed in constructing the Tabernacle.

In analyzing the Tabernacle’s construction, the Sages broke it down into its basic categories of creative activity. For example, the curtains were made of wool, woven on a loom. This seemingly straightforward activity required no fewer than eight of the 39 categories of creative work:

1. Shearing the wool
2. Cleaning it
3. Combing it
4. Dying it

5. Twining it into threads

8. Weaving the curtain

6 & 7. Setting up the loom

This is how all 39 categories of forbidden activity were similarly derived.

Invoking the idea that the Tabernacle's construction constituted the creation of a miniature world, which corresponds to Hashem's creation of our world, the deep connection between the two ideas becomes clear. Just as Hashem rested from His creative acts of creating the world on Shabbat, so, too, we must rest from our creative acts on the miniature world that we are creating, the Mishkan, on the Shabbat day.

There is another layer of depth. Rabbi Yitzchak Issac Chaver (Student of the Vilna Gaon) writes.

ספר ביאורי אגדות (אפיקי ים) - שבת דף קד ע"א

וז"ס המשכן שבו הי' נכלל כל הבריאה שלכן נסמכה פי' שבת למלאכת המשכן שהם הל"ט אבות מלאכות שהי' במשכן, שהם עצמם שהיו בו' ימי בראשית ששבת מהם בשבת

This is the secret of the Tabernacle, which included the entire creation. This is why Shabbat was placed next to the building of the Tabernacle, because those 39 categories of creative actions that were necessary for the Tabernacle's construction are the identical actions that Hashem used during the six days of creation and from which Hashem rested on Shabbat.

When we keep the Shabbat and refrain from doing any of the 39 categories of forbidden actions, we are actually refraining from the very actions that Hashem refrained from when He rested on Shabbat. Wow!

This is why the Shabbat is such an important part of Judaism. Refraining from the 39 categories of creative activity has its roots in the deepest places in creation; Hashem Himself refrained from them, and the existence of the entire world depends on it.

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Hakohen Kagan, d. 1933) compares Shabbat to the heart of the Jewish people. Imagine a person was in a serious accident. A team of doctors converges on the patient, each a specialist in one organ or another. All of a sudden, all of the doctors make way for another doctor. He is the heart doctor. If the heart is no good, all the rest of the doctors are irrelevant. Just as the a person is dependent on his heart. So too, the existence of the Jewish people depends on the Shabbat.

This helps us define what types of actions are called “מלאכה-*melacha*” that are forbidden on Shabbat. Despite the prevalent erroneous translation, *Melacha* doesn’t mean “work.” Destructive or uncreative work is not forbidden on Shabbat. For example, if I have guests for the Shabbat afternoon meal and I must bring tables and chairs up from the

basement to accommodate them, even though the tables are heavy and may cause me to sweat when I shlep them, that activity would be permissible on Shabbat. Yet, I am not permitted to flip on a light switch! The type of acts forbidden on Shabbat are *creative* acts, similar to what Hashem did when He created the world, and similar to what Betzalel and his assistants did when they created the Tabernacle. How much creativity and ingenuity went into creating the light switch and everything behind it to cause it to turn on the light when I flip it! That's what is forbidden on Shabbat! Crude grunt work should not be done unless necessary for Shabbat (because of the spirit of the day) but nevertheless is permitted since there is no creativity involved.

After creating man on the sixth day, Hashem told him (Genesis 1:28).

כח) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ
וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיַּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל הָאָרֶץ

*(28) And Hashem blessed them and Hashem said to them. Be fruitful and multiply fill up the earth and **conquer it**, and rule over the fish in the seas, the birds in the heavens, and all living creatures that roam the earth.*

Hashem instructed man to “*conquer the earth!*” This means that we are commanded to mine the ores in the earth and use the resulting metals as we please. We are allowed to

use animal hides for our shoes and their wool for our clothing. We are allowed to cut down trees and use their wood for building, furniture, and paper. Man has done a marvelous job of fulfilling this command of Hashem! Just look around and see the infinite ingenious ways through which man has figured out how to use the raw materials Hashem has put into the earth. Hashem gave man mastery over His world.

Hashem then said (Exodus 35:2), *“Six days you may do melacha, but the seventh day will be a holy day for you, a Shabbat to Hashem, who ever does melacha will be punished by death.”* You may use My world creatively for the six days of creation, but, on the seventh day, just as I did not create, you must also refrain from doing any creative activity. I created the world, and I give you permission to be creative with it, but only six days of the week. On the seventh, Shabbat, you must acknowledge Me as the Creator and Master of the world by following My instructions not to use My world creatively on this day.

This is why flipping on a light on Shabbat is forbidden. People erroneously say, “Where’s the work? It’s not nearly as hard as schlepping tables!” But think about how many patents underly the system that allows light to come from a light bulb when you flip the switch. Every single component of

that elaborate and complex system was created by man's ingenuity and creativity. This is the meaning of *melacha*.

Take a look around you. Notice the different types of materials that comprise the various objects that you see. Some are metal, some are plastic, some are wood. There are literally thousands of different materials, many natural, many man-made. Even those that occur in nature require refining and crafting by the human being. Now pay attention to the design of the various items. Is any detail of the design an accident, or was painstaking care taken to create a product that would not only be functional, but also aesthetically pleasing? Of course we know that much care and thought went into the crafting of each of the nifty objects we observe.

The only creature on the planet capable of creating aesthetically pleasing, functional, durable items is the human being. This is part of what being human means; being creative, and the more creative the better. This marvelous ability, the spice of life, is a gift from Hashem. In a way it is part of our *צלם אלקים* “*image of Hashem*,” our ability to be creators.

Hashem is the ultimate Creator, the One who created this magnificent world and all the miraculous items in it. He rested from His creative actions on Shabbat, and He commanded us to do the same. He says, “If it was important

to Me to refrain from creating on the Shabbat, the same should apply to you.”

This is why the Sages tell us, “Whoever desecrates the Shabbat, it is as if he has worshipped an idol and has denied the existence of Hashem.” How so?

When renting a car, a person must sign a contract to uphold the conditions of the rental company. What gives them the right to impose conditions on him? Well, because it’s their car and they will only allow him to rent it if he accepts their conditions. When he violates the conditions of the contract, it is as if he is saying, “Who are you to impose restrictions on my use of this car? Is it yours?”

Hashem as the Creator and Master of the world has similarly told us that we may not use His world on the Shabbat in a creative way. This is the condition that the Owner of the world has put on it. Since it’s Hashem’s world, we must defer to Him as the Owner and Creator. If we do as we please with Hashem’s world and ignore his instructions to us, it is as if we are saying to Him, “What right do You have to tell me what to do with my possessions? They are mine and I can do with them as I please. You have no authority to tell me what to do with them!” In short, we are denying Hashem as the Creator.

There is yet another deep connection between the Tabernacle and the Shabbat.

The Tabernacle represented the dwelling place for Hashem's Holy presence. Different degrees of holiness presented themselves as one proceeded into the Tabernacle. Only a Cohen was allowed in, and if he was not spiritually clean (טהור), he would be liable for the death penalty for entering. The קדש הקדשים - *Holy of Holies*, where the Holy Ark resided, was off limits even to the High Priest, also upon the penalty of death, except for on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. The area within the walls of the Tabernacle was sacred because Hashem's Holiness dwelled there.

This holy place is where a person went to rejuvenate his connection with Hashem. Hashem's presence was tangible there. If you ever felt something stir inside of you when you were at the Kotel *Hamaaravi*, multiply that by many times!

The Shabbat also represents a sanctuary for Hashem's Holiness. The Tabernacle was a sanctuary in *space*, and the Shabbat is a sanctuary in *time*. From sundown Friday night until stars-out Saturday night, the day of Shabbat is permeated with Hashem's holiness. It is a day that we must guard from unholy influences so that we can derive the maximum benefit from the intrinsic holiness that it has to offer. Just as when the Holy Temple stood people would go there to infuse themselves with its holiness, which would help them stay close to Hashem, so, too, we retreat to the

holiness of Shabbat every week to infuse ourselves with the holiness of Shabbat and to reconnect to Hashem. Not only do we reconnect to Hashem on Shabbat, we also reconnect to our loved ones - our spouses, children, parents, and friends. When the Shabbat enters, all our work is done. There is nothing more that we can do, so after a whole week of running around from one important matter to another, we are finally able to relax and forget about the matters that occupied us all week and enjoy the time with the family. We are very careful not to allow the distracting noise coming from the world around us to enter our homes and disturb the tranquility of the Shabbat.

When the captain of a shipwreck washed up on the shore of an island, he was found and nursed back to health by a religious Jewish family. The captain was placed to recuperate on the sofa in the living room from which he was able to see into the dining room. He woke up from his deep sleep on Friday night, and unbeknown to the host family, he was able to observe them as they sat around the table enjoying their Shabbat dinner. He observed the family - parents and children - all dressed in the finest formal clothing, seated at a table covered with a lace tablecloth, set with fine china and silverware. There was wine on the table and candles were burning. A five-course dinner was served, and intelligent conversation and singing were interspersed throughout,

without any concern for time. They were totally engrossed in each other, without a care in the world. After observing this rare scene for a while, he was convinced that he had woken up in the royal palace and that he was observing the royal family. Where else does a family sit together in such royalty and just enjoy each other as if the rest of the world does not exist?

Although we now lack the sanctuary of the Holy Temple, we do still have the sanctuary of the Shabbat, and keeping it validates Hashem as our Creator and the Creator of the Universe.

In considering keeping the Shabbat, one may become disillusioned because its many laws and prohibitions seem to render it an impossible task. The good news is, that Shabbat does not necessarily have to be an all or nothing proposition. Keeping even one law of Shabbat, throughout the Shabbat's 25 hours, is keeping the Shabbat and it puts a person into the category of a "*Shomer Shabbat*" a Shabbat observant Jew, for that thing.

Let's say that a person decides not to turn on lights over the course of the Shabbat. Before Shabbat, he turns on all the lights that he thinks that he will need and leaves them on the whole Shabbat. (In the bedroom, the closet light could be left on and the door closed when darkness is needed.) Or, let's

say a person simply turns off his phone for the entire Shabbat. Since he is curtailing his activity in this particular area out of respect for the Shabbat, he is keeping the Shabbat. A person can choose any law of Shabbat that resonates with him and keep it. This will change his status to a Shomer Shabbat, one who observes the Shabbat.

Hopefully, this will be the first step of many, but the message that he will be sending to Hashem and to the world is, that “I respect that You, Hashem, created the world in six days and rested on the Shabbat.” There is no more powerful message than that!