

Parsha Vayakhel-Pekudei

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. How Much are we Affected by Our Surroundings?

The Gemara in *Tractate Shabbos* says that when the Klal Yisroel said, “*Naaseh V’nishma (We shall do and we shall listen)*” at Sinai regarding the Torah, the angels in heaven were astounded at this level of selfless devotion. The Gemara tells us that when Klal Yisroel said *Naaseh V’nishma*, G-d sent 600,000 angels bearing two crowns for each Jew – one for *Naaseh (we shall do)* and another for *V’nishma (we shall listen)*. These crowns were not physical crowns but rather representations of higher levels of spirituality.

After the Jewish people sinned with the *Chet HaAigil (sin of the Golden Calf)*, which was idol worship, Hashem sent angels to take back the crowns that were given to them. This indicated that the Jewish people were reduced from their level of spirituality as a result of their participation in the *Chet HaAigil*. The Gemara tells us that *Moshe Rabbeinu* received all of the crowns that were taken back from Klal Yisroel. As a result of receiving these crowns, which were the most advanced level of spirituality of the Jewish people, Moshe radiated with holiness.

The Torah tells us that the tribe of Levy merited becoming the officiants of Hashem because they were the only segment of the Jewish people who were opposed to and did not participate in the *Chet HaAigil*. One can understand why those who participated in the *Chet HaAigil* had to relinquish their crowns thus being reduced in their spirituality; however, why were the crowns of the tribe of Levy also taken from them if they were not involved to any degree in *Chet HaAigil*?

From the spiritual diminishment of the Tribe of Levy, despite their non-involvement in idolatry we are able to understand that when evil is introduced into existence all people in existence are diminished regardless of their participation. Simply put, being in the same environment as idolatry causes one to be spiritually diminished. Moshe on the other hand was not affected in any way by the spiritual impurity brought about by the *Chet HaAigil* because at that moment he was not part of that existence. Moshe was in Heaven learning the Torah from Hashem. He therefore had the capacity to receive the all-encompassing spirituality of the Klal Yisroel.

Every day we recite at the end of the Amidah (the silent prayer), “**May the meal offering of Yehuda and Yerushaliyim be pleasant to Hashem like the earlier times.**” The *Yalkut* explains that “**earlier times**” is not referring to the period of the Bais HaMikdash when Klal Yisroel had last brought sacrifices, but rather to the sacrifice that were brought by Adam. The reason why Adam’s offering was so special was because at that time idolatry had not yet been introduced into existence. Because the world was pristine and pure, the offerings, which were brought by Adam were the most affective.

Why when Klal Yisroel will bring sacrifices in the Third Bais HaMikdash, should it matter that there is paganism in existence? Why would our offerings be affected? The answer is that if there is idolatry and paganism in the world, regardless of how much we oppose idolatry, our spirituality will be limited because we would be living in an existence of idolatry. Our continuous daily prayer to Hashem is that when the Third Bais HaMikdash will be built that idolatry is expunged from this existence and the offerings that we will bring to Hashem will be as spiritually affective as those that were brought by Adam.

2. One Must Appreciate G-d in order to Praise Him

The Torah states, “**Moses assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them, These are the things that Hashem commanded to do.**” The *Yalkut* tells us that Hashem

told to Moshe,” **Gather large assemblies of Jews and teach them the laws of Shabbos so that future generations may learn from your behavior –to gather large assemblies of Jews each Shabbos in the study halls to learn the laws of what is “permitted” and what is ”forbidden”.** **You shall do this so that My Great Name shall be praised among My children.”** How is the name of Hashem “praised” among His children if they are studying the laws of what is “permitted” and what is ”forbidden”?

One way to understand this, is as the Gemara tells us that after the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash [(the Temple), which was the location of the Divine Presence in this world] Hashem’s location in existence is only within the **“Four cubits of Halacha”**. Therefore by gathering large groups of Jews and teaching them normative Halacha (definitive Jewish Law), Hashem will be praised among His people. This pertains specifically to the study of Halacha and not simply the teachings of arguments contained within the Talmud. Therefore, in order for Hashem’s Presence to be found within our midst the laws of what is “permitted” and what is “forbidden” must be taught.

Another way to understand this, is that in order for us to appreciate and have a sense of Hashem, we must understand what He wants from us in this world. It is only possible to understand who G-d is if we have an understanding of His Will. Thus, when we study the laws which pertain to our daily lives (what is “permitted” and “forbidden”) – only then are we able to appreciate and understand who He is. Even if one believes that G-d wants us to be “a good person” – the question is what is considered “a good person”? Is a “good person” defined by society? Or by what one thinks a “good person” is? Or is it only through the adherence to G-d’s Laws that one can be classified as a “good person”. Because only G-d knows what is truly in our best interest.

Chazal tells us based on a *Zohar* that Hashem, His Torah, and the Jewish people are one entity. Therefore if Hashem and the Torah are one entity, Klal Yisroel can only understand and appreciate Hashem through the Torah. Studying the laws of the Torah is the only way we have relevance to Him and are able to relate to what Hashem expects from us and consequently who He is. The Torah is our link to Hashem. Therefore the only way His Name can be praised and exalted is through the study of Normative Halacha.

Chazal tell us that at the time of the destruction of the First Temple, Hashem said, **“Even if the Jewish people abandoned Me, If they would have only kept My Torah, the illumination contained in it would have been brought them back to good.”** We see from this Midrash that studying Torah provides us with certain enlightenment and understanding that will ultimately cause us to do what is proper and correct. In addition, it is through this enlightenment we can appreciate Hashem and therefore be able to praise Him. One can only praise that which he understands and appreciates. This is why Hashem told Moshe to gather the Jewish people and teach them the laws of Shabbos so that future generations will learn to gather large assemblies to study the laws of what is “permitted” and what is “forbidden” so that His name will be praised.

Moshe tells the Jewish people in *Devorim (the Book of Deuteronomy)*, “It is your wisdom and perception (the Torah) in the eyes of the nations of the world.” The Siforno cites a passage from *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers)*, “Know what to respond to the heretic.” It is only through the proficiency of Torah can one respond cogently to the questions posed to him. We understand from this though learning and living a life of Torah is the way that we will be esteemed in the eyes of the world. Therefore in order for Hashem’s name to be praised among us, and to facilitate Kiddush Hashem we must study to gain that proficiency.

3. Having the Capacity to Contain Holiness

The Torah tells us that the Mishkan (*Sanctuary*) needed to be constructed in order to accommodate the Presence of Hashem among the Jewish people- as it is stated in the verse, **“You should make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst.”** The Siforno says that if Klal Yisroel had not sinned with the Golden Calf (*Chet HaAigil*), we would have not needed to build a Mishkan, because the Jewish people themselves would have been the Sanctuary in which Hashem

would have dwelt. However as a result of the *Chet HaAigil* we became spiritually tainted and were no longer qualified to be that Sanctuary. Since we could no longer qualified to have that direct relationship with the Divine Presence (*Shechina*) the Mishkan was needed to be the medium through which Hashem dwelled among the Jewish people.

The Siforno notes that the Torah discusses the vessels of the Mishkan throughout several portions of the Torah rather than in a single portion in order to communicate to us that the various vessels served in different capacities. In Parshas Terumah the *Mizbeiach Ha'Olah* (the sacrificial alter), the *Menorah* (the Candelabra), and the *Shulchan* (the Golden Table) are mentioned. The Siforno explains that the purpose of these vessels of the Mishkan were necessary to accommodate the Divine Presence (*Shechina*) itself.

In Parshas Titzaveh the Torah mentions the *Mizbeiach Ha'Zahav* (the golden alter), which was used for the incense offering. The *Mizbeiach Ha'Zahav's* function was to honor and glorify the *Shechina* that was present through the burning of the incense. In Parshas Ki Sisa the Torah mentions the *Kiyor* (the laver), which was used by the Kohanim (the priests) to ritualize their hands and feet in order to be qualified to officiate in the Mishkan.

We find in that there were three functions that were contained within the context of the Mishkan.: firstly the *Mizbeiach Ha'Olah*, the *Menorah*, and the *Shulchan* created the setting to draw down the Divine Presence. Secondly the *Mizbeiach Ha'Zahav* was a mechanism to glorify the *Shechina* once it had been brought into Mishkan. The *Kyyor* was then necessary to qualify the Kohan to serve the *Shechina*. The Mishkan within this function was only needed to bring the *Shechina* only because the Jewish people had sinned with the *Chet HaAigil*.

Why did Hashem demand that the Klal Yisroel should relinquish their level of spirituality after the Sin of the Golden Calf– was it because they were no longer worthy of such a lofty level? Or was it because if they would have retained that special level (despite their failing) they could not deal with that intensity of relationship with Hashem?

The Talmud in *Tractate Yomah* that during the Second Temple period (which stood for 420 years) there more than 300 High Priests. Every year on Yom Kippur, when the High Priest officiate in the Holy of Holies (the location of the Divine Presence) he would expire, because he was not qualified to enter into such a holy location. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh says that the only Moshe Rabbeinu is referred to by the Torah as *Ishe Elokim* (man of G-d – *Elokim* is the appellation of Hashem when He is interacting with the attribute of Justice) – not even the holy Patriarchs were referred to in this manner.

Moshe was the only person who had such a level of spiritual perfection that he was able to withstand the Attribute of. If one is not at the special level of spiritual perfection the Attribute of Justice will destroy him. We can now understand that in actuality it was a blessing for Hashem to compel us to relinquish our spiritual crowns because if we would not have done so we would not have been able to survive that level of relationship.

We find an application of this concept regarding a tzaddik (righteous person). The Talmud tells us that Hashem's exactness with a tzaddik is to the degree of a hairbreadth. If the Tzaddik were to deviate as much as an iota from performing the Will of Hashem, he is punished. This is because the Tzaddik is at a level of relationship where he is expected to behave in a more perfect manner; however, those who are not at that level are beneficiaries of the *Midas HaRachamim*, the Attribute of Mercy.

4. The Microcosm of Existence

In this week's parsha Moshe announced to the Jewish people that Bezalel was going to be responsible for overseeing the building of the Mishkan (the Sanctuary),” **Moshe said to the Children of Israel,”See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. He filled him with G-dly spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh*) with wisdom**

(chachma), insight (beenah), and knowledge (daas) and with every craft...” The Gemara in *Tractate Berachos* tells us that Bezalel had the special understanding as to how to conjugate letters of the Hebrew alphabet (*osyios*- which is equivalent to understanding the inner workings of existence). Why was it necessary for Bezalel to be endowed by Hashem with this special understanding of the inner workings of Creation?

The Gemara tells us that the Torah juxtaposes the laws of Shabbos to the laws of the building of the Mishkan in order to teach us that the laws of Shabbos take precedence over the building of the Mishkan, therefore one is not permitted to violate the Shabbos in order to build the Mishkan. In addition, we learn from this juxtaposition the thirty-nine classifications of creative activities that are forbidden on the Shabbos. The creative activities that were needed to build the Mishkan are the same creative activities that are forbidden on Shabbos. The question is- what relevance do the creative activities which were needed to bring about the Mishkan have to do with the Shabbos?

In the first set of tablets that contained the Ten Commandments, the Torah tells us that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Jews, who are G-d’s people, are permitted to work six days and must rest on the seventh day.

Shabbos is a time when the Jewish people attest to the fact that Hashem is the creator of the world. The Gemara in *Tractate Chullin* states that a Jew who does not observe the Shabbos is the equivalent to an apostate because his non-observance is a denial that Hashem is the creator of the world. If the observance of the Shabbos is to attest that Hashem is the Creator of existence – What relevance do the creative activities of the Mishkan have to the creation of the world?

The *Yalkut* tells us that every aspect of Creation is alluded to in the Mishkan. The Mishkan itself was a microcosm of existence. There was no aspect of existence that was not reflected in the Mishkan. We can now understand why the Gemara tells us that Hashem endowed Bezalel with the understanding of the inner workings of creation that was brought about through the conjugation of the Hebrew alphabet. Since the Mishkan was a microcosm of existence the same intent and abilities that were employed in the act of Creation was needed to be inculcated into the building of the Mishkan. Bezalel needed to access and utilize those forces and influences that were used to create existence.

Chazal state at the beginning of the Book of Genesis (*Parshas Bereishis*) that **“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.”** This means that the Torah itself was the “blueprint” of Creation. Hashem told Moshe that the Mishkan should be built according to the design that was given to him “on the mountain (Sinai)“. This blueprint was given to Bezalel who was endowed by Hashem with *chachma, binah, daas* had the ability to activate and unleash the forces of creation to be infused into the Mishkan.

The function of the Mishkan was that of Creation itself. Chazal tell us that the *shulchan (the golden table)* in the Mishkan was the conduit for all the wealth to come into this world. The *Menorah (illumination)* provided the elucidation of Torah to the Jewish people. The 70 oxen that were brought on the Festival of Sukkos, correspond to the 70 root nations of the world. Just as the world needs to be sustained and nourished so to the Mishkan (the microcosm of the world) need to be sustained through the offerings.

At the end of the *Amidah (the silent prayer)*, we ask Hashem to rebuild the Bais HaMikdash speedily in our time and that we should have a share in the Torah. What is the connection between rebuilding the Bais HaMikdash and having a share in the Torah? As Chazal tell us, the blueprint of the physical world was the Torah itself (the world was only created to accommodate every aspect of Torah) so to the Mishkan, being a corollary of all existence (microcosm of the world), has the same function as the world- which is only for the sake of Torah.

5. Appreciating our Inheritance

There are approximately 13 million Jews in the world today and the overwhelming majority of

whom are completely disconnected from their Judaism. If one also takes into account all of the attempts to destroy the Jewish people by our enemies throughout history, one would think that that the Jewish people would have already faded from existence. Despite these daunting statistic there are Jews who are observant and are connected with their Jewish essence. The question is why?

Some may say that being connected to Judaism depends on the manner in which one is raised; however, we see statistically that this theory is not valid. One may also say that perhaps having certain special life experiences or meeting special people is a determining factor in becoming connected to Judaism. We see, however, many individuals who have had “life changing experiences” and yet remain unchanged. On the other hand we find that certain individuals do become inspired and cleave to their Jewish essence and grow in the study of Torah and observance. How are some people affected while others are not? Is being inspired dependent on our intellectual capacity, abilities or sensitivities?

The Torah tells us, **”See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. He filled him with G-dly spirit (*Rooach HaKodesh*) with wisdom (*chachma*), insight (*beenah*), and knowledge (*daas*) and with every craft...”** to oversee the building of the Mishkan. Chazal tell us that at the age of thirteen, Bezalel (whose name means *B'tzayil Kail [in the shadow of G-d]*) understood the mechanics of existence almost as much as Moshe Rabbeinu. How did Bezalel come to such a level of understanding and how was able to attain the spiritual capacity to oversee the building of the Mishkan (which was the microcosm of all existence)?

The Midrash answers this question by using an allegory. There once was a general who fought and won many battles for the glory of his king. The general lived his life seeking to increase his king's honor and glory. The king decided to reward the general for his undying loyalty and efforts; however, the general was killed during the course of his last battle. The king was unable to reward and honor his general. Therefore the king sought the general's closest relative (his grandson) and bestowed the recognition and status on the grandson.

The Torah refers to Bezalel specifically as, **“Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur.”** Bezalel was Hur's grandson who was willing to give his life to prevent the Jewish people from committing the sin of the Golden Calf. Bezalel's grandfather, Hur, stood up against the rabble who were inciting the Jewish people to make the Golden calf and as a result he was killed. Hur lost his life by trying to sanctify G-d's name. Since Hashem could not reward Hur in this world for his actions, Hashem bestowed the honor and status to Hur's grandson, Bezalel. This is the reason why Bezalel was endowed with all of his special abilities and insight.

There is no question that most of us had ancestors who were committed Jews who studied and observed the Torah. Nevertheless we see in our time that only small remnant of Jews are connected to their Judaism. It is clear that this connection does not stem only from one's intellectual capabilities, emotional sensitivity, or life experiences but rather it is a reward and privilege, which has been granted to us because of our antecedents. We should understand that we are able to connect to our Judaism because of the merit of our ancestors. If we understand this and appreciate that the Jewish people and the Torah will not fade from existence only because of our inherited merit then we will not become haughty and arrogant.

6. The Jewish People Exit Because of the Women.

The Torah tells us that the copper that was used to make the *Kyyor (the laver)* came from the copper mirrors that were used by the Jewish women in Egypt. The Torah refers to these mirrors as the (*maros ha'tzavos –the mirrors of the women who congregated*).

Rashi explains *maros ha'tzavos*, **”The daughters of Israel had in their possession copper mirrors which they would look into when they would beautify themselves. Even those mirrors they did not withhold from bringing for the contribution toward the Mishkan. But Moshe rejected these mirrors because they were made for accomplishing the will of the Evil**

Inclination (namely vanity). The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, "Accept them because these are the dearest to Me of all, for by means of them, the women established many legions of offspring in Egypt. When their husbands would be exhausted by the hard labor imposed upon them by the Egyptians, the women would go and bring their husbands food and drink and feed them. Then they would take the copper mirrors and each would view herself with her husband in the mirror, and entice him with words, saying, "I am handsomer than you." By these means, they would bring their husbands to desire, and would have relations with them and conceive and give birth there."

Rashi concludes that the *Kyyor*, which was made from these mirrors, was meant to make peace between a husband and his wife because this was the vessel from which a woman would drink in order to alleviate the suspicion that she may have committed adultery (*y'maiy sotah*- the water of the suspected adulteress). The Torah tells us that if a woman was forewarned by her husband not to sequester herself with another man and she ignored his warning, she becomes a suspected adulteress and cannot cohabit with her husband until she drinks from the *y'maiy sotah*(water from the *Kyyor*). The process of absolving the woman from her suspected adultery involves taking a scroll which has the name of Hashem written on it and obliterating that name in the water before the woman drinks it. This is how peace is restored between husband and wife (*shalom bais*).

At a simple level, we can understand that for the sake of *shalom bais*, Hashem allows His name to be obliterated. Obliterating the name of Hashem, outside of this context, is a Torah violation and strictly forbidden. Therefore Hashem values *shalom bais* so much that He is willing to nullify a Torah commandment in order to restore peace between husband and wife. However, based on Rashi's explanation of Chazal, we can come to a deeper meaning of the role of the copper mirrors, the *Kyyor*, and the *y'maiy sotah*.

If there would not be a Jewish people in existence would Hashem's name be known to the world? It is only because Klal Yisroel publicizes the name of Hashem in this existence that He is known and His essence revealed. As it is stated, **"The world was created for Yisroel who are called the Chosen people."** And the only reason why there is a Klal Yisroel that is able to publicize Hashem's name is because the Jewish women in Egypt used their mirrors to encourage their husbands to procreate.

Had it not been for the women, Klal Yisroel would have disappeared from existence. Hashem therefore has tremendous gratitude for what the woman had done in Egypt and owes them great reward. Because of what the women did on Egypt His name is known in the world. This is why Hashem says that His name could be obliterated on their behalf in the case of the suspected adulteress (*sotah*). Hashem's name can be obliterated in the case of the *sotah* not simply to restore *shalom bais* but rather it is because He owes a debt of gratitude to the women for enabling His name to be known in this existence through their actions in Egypt.

The Torah tells us that only the Kohen is qualified to obliterate the name of Hashem in the *Kyyor* in order to administer the *y'maiy sotah*. Why was the Kohen chosen to perform this ritual? It is not considered a service of the Sanctuary?

When the Jewish people were involved with the *Chet HaAigil*, only the Tribe of Levy did not participate. All of the other tribes were involved with the *Chet HaAigil* and were clearly were not concerned with the sanctity of the name of Hashem. The Levy who did not participate in the desecration of Hashem's name through the *Chet HaAigil* is thus the only one who is qualified to perform the ritual of the *sotah*, which entails obliterating Hashem's name. We see however that it is not the Levy who performs the ritual of the *sotah* but rather the Kohen. How do we understand this?

The Gemara in *Tractate Nidarim* tells us that when Aaron *Ha'Kohen* (Moshe's brother) passed away everyone cried because he was involved with *shalom bais*- as it is stated in the verse, **"Aaron loved peace and he pursued peace."** The Gemara states that if a husband makes a vow that his wife cannot benefit from him in anyway unless she spits in the High Priest's eye (the Koher

Gadol) it is a valid vow and the marriage is finished.

Aaron *Ha'Kohen* pursued peace to such a degree that if he was made aware of such a vow, he would have approached the man's wife and told her that she should spit in his eye because the doctor said that it was the only way he could get cured from his eye ailment. This would have restored the marriage. We see from Aaron's conduct that he established that the Kohen has the characteristic *shalom* and has relevance to *shalom bais*. We can now understand why the Kohen is the one who conducts the ritual of the *sotah* and not the Levy.

The Tribe of Levy did not participate in the *Chet HaAigil* and therefore had relevance to being able to obliterate Hashem's name in the ritual of the *sotah*; however, it was the Kohen (who was part of the Tribe of Levy) who expressed the characteristic of *shalom* as we see from Aaron HaKohen. He understood that had it not been for the women there would be no Klal Yisroel and no publicizing of Hashem's name. He therefore went to any length to pursue peace between husband and wife not just to maintain *shalom bais* but also to perpetuate the Jewish people to sanctify Hashem. This is why the Kohen is the only person qualified to obliterate Hashem's name in the ritual of the *sotah*.