

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Right at the end of the book of Shemot, there is a textual difficulty so slight that it is easy to miss, yet -- as interpreted by Rashi -- it contains one of the great clues as to the nature of Jewish identity: it is a moving testimony to the unique challenge of being a Jew.

First, the background. The Tabernacle is finally complete. Its construction has taken many chapters to relate. No other event in the wilderness years is portrayed in such detail. Now, on the first of Nissan, exactly a year after Moses told the people to begin their preparations for the exodus, he assembles the beams and hangings, and puts the furniture and vessels in place. There is an unmistakable parallelism between the words the Torah uses to describe Moses' completion of the work and those it uses of God on the seventh day of creation: "And Moses finished [vayechal] the work [hamelakhah]. And God finished [vayechal] on the seventh day the work [melakhto] which He had done."

The next verse states the result: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle."

The meaning is both clear and revolutionary. The creation of the Sanctuary by the Israelites is intended to represent a human parallel to the Divine creation of the universe. In making the world, God created a home for mankind. In making the Tabernacle, mankind created a home for God.

From a human perspective, God fills the space we make for His presence. His glory exists where we renounce ours. The immense detail of the construction is there to tell us that throughout, the Israelites were obeying God's instructions rather than improvising their own. The specific domain called "the holy" is where we meet God on His terms, not ours. Yet this too is God's way of conferring dignity on mankind. It is we who build His home so that He may fill what we have made. In the words of a famous film: "If you build it, he will come."

Bereishit begins with God making the cosmos. Shemot ends with human beings making a micro-cosmos, a miniature and symbolic universe. Thus the entire narrative of Genesis-Exodus is a single vast span that begins and ends with the concept of God-filled space, with this difference: that in the beginning the

work is done by God-the-Creator. By the end it is done by man-and-woman-the-creators. The whole intricate history has been a story with one overarching theme: the transfer of the power and responsibility of creation from heaven to earth, from God to the image-of-God called mankind.

That is the background. However, the final verses of the book go on to tell us about the relationship between the "cloud of glory" and the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, we recall, was not a fixed structure. It was made in such a way as to be portable. It could quickly be dismantled and its parts carried, as the Israelites made their way to the next stage of their journey. When the time came for the Israelites to move on, the cloud moved from its resting place in the Tent of Meeting to a position outside the camp, signalling the direction they must now take. This is how the Torah describes it: "When the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, the Israelites went onward in all their journeys, but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel in all their journeys." (Ex. 40:36-38)

There is a small but significant difference between the two instances of the phrase *bechol mas'ehem*, "in all their journeys". In the first instance the words are to be taken literally. When the cloud lifted and moved on ahead, the Israelites knew they were about to travel.

However in the second instance they cannot be taken literally. The cloud was not over the Tabernacle in all their journeys. On the contrary: it was there only when they stopped travelling and instead pitched camp. During the journeys the cloud went on ahead.

Noting this, Rashi makes the following comment: "A place where they encamped is also called *massa*, 'a journey'... Because from the place of encampment they always set out again on a new journey, therefore they are all called 'journeys'".

The point is linguistic, but the message is anything but. Rashi has encapsulated in a few brief words -- "a place where they encamped is also called a journey" -- the existential truth at the heart of Jewish identity. So long as we have not yet reached our destination, even a place of rest is still called a journey -- because we know we are not here forever. There is a way still to go. In the words of the poet Robert Frost,

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep. / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep." *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l ©2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he set the laver between the Tent of the Meeting and the altar, and put water there for washing. And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet...” (Exodus 40:30–31) Before the priests would enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar, they were commanded to wash their hands and feet from the laver. Not doing so was a capital offense, as expressed in the portion of Ki Tisa: “If they are not to die they must wash with the water before entering the tent of meeting...” (Ex. 30:20)

The washing of one's hands and feet may have been the easiest of all the required rituals in the Sanctuary, but that didn't make it any less significant. On the contrary, not only was it the prerequisite for the priest's presence in the Sanctuary, but the washing of the priests has become an essential part of the halakhic life of every Jew – such as washing one's hands upon rising, or before the eating of bread.

Therefore, it's interesting that the very last physical item connected to the rituals of the Sanctuary that the Torah mentions is the washstand, or laver. The portion of Pekudei closes the book of Exodus. Pekudei means “These are the accounts of...”, and that's exactly what the portion does: a detailed summation of everything that God commanded and the architects constructed. After nearly half of the book of Exodus's devotion to the Sanctuary, this portion provides the closing statement. And what is the last Sanctuary “furnishing,” in effect the sum-up, which is recorded in the Torah? The washstand. True, the enclosure is also mentioned, but the enclosure is not a physical item; a hatzer (as the Torah calls it), encloses space, defining an area between other spaces. It is certainly not part of Sanctuary ritual as we understand the washstand to be.

If it's true that the Torah wants us to pay particular attention to this washstand, then we must reread its description in the previous portion: “He made the copper laver and its copper base out of the mirrors of the service women [armies of women] who congregated to serve at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.” (Exodus 38:8)

It is significant that the Torah speaks of the mirrors of the women. After all, a mirror is one of those objects which is at best taken for granted as we gaze into it and check for excesses and wrinkles, and at worst causes us slight embarrassment at our vain concern with physical appearance. Is it not strange that such “vanities” are to be considered worthy of being

used by the priests to sanctify their hands with water before the start of any ceremony or offering?

When the commandment was originally given in Ki Tisa, the Torah did not command the women to donate their copper mirrors. Indeed, as we have previously seen, Ibn Ezra calls the women's contribution a victory of spiritual values over physical vanity. The daughters of Israel didn't need these mirrors anymore; they wanted to serve God by emphasizing good deeds over good looks, and their gifts of the mirrors were symbolic of this change.

Rashi, in questioning the Midrash Tanchuma, describing how the women enticed their husbands by means of the mirrors to have sexual relations with them, wants to stress that one should not be quick to reject the physical – even sexual – aspect of our existence. If anything, Judaism ennobles sex and love within marriage, which is why “kiddushin,” the Hebrew for marriage, is rooted in the word for holy, “kadosh”! When two separate people become physically united in order to become partners with God in creating another person, they are engaging in one of the holiest acts a human being can pursue. And if a mirror can help in the process, what finer material is there for the sanctification of the priest's hands before he performs the divine service?

Moreover, from this perspective, the mirrors signal to God the women's profound faith in a Jewish future. Imagine Egypt under Pharaoh's rule, a Holocaust of 210 years' duration! Knowing that his sons would be drowned in the Nile and his daughters forced to live with Egyptian slave-masters, why on earth would any Hebrew want to bring more children into the world?

But thank God for their wives, the Almighty is teaching Moses. The women remembered the divine promises made to the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs which foretold the ultimate redemption of the people and their entry into the Promised Land. The women urged their husbands not to despair, to believe in a Jewish future! In the midst of torturous persecution, slavery and infanticide, bringing more Jewish children into the world was an act of supreme faith. And the mirrors were the instruments for the expression of that faith.

I believe yet another lesson lies in the sanctity of the mirrors. The Hebrew word for mirror, marah, has the very same letters as mareh, appearance. And seeing our appearance in a mirror does not only emphasize our physical selves. We all realize that we are more than that which the mirror reflects. After all, the mirror does not show our inner selves, our memories and aspirations, our dreams and our fears. Every time the priest would sanctify his hands and look in the mirror, he would be inspired to reflect not only on his own face, but on all the faces of all the people who would be seeking atonement in the Sanctuary.

Let us ponder for a moment: Who commonly

came to the Sanctuary? People in search of atonement, individuals bringing guilt and sin offerings. Hence, the danger would lie in how easy it was to forget the individual behind the person who arrived with his offering. It was too easy for the priest to make his human judgments based upon the single instance when he would see the supplicant with his sacrifice; he would tend to forget that one who commits a sin is not necessarily a sinner. A one-time lapse does not necessarily define an individual's character and personality! One of the important lessons the mirror taught is that people are not how they appear to be on the surface. Just as the priest understood that the face staring back at him in the laver is hardly the total picture – there's a lot more to us than what stares back in the glass – so too he could not possibly judge his "clients" by the reason they entered the Sanctuary.

And is this not the true message of the women's gift? After all, the women who beautified themselves for their husbands were an easy target for a cynic to ridicule their efforts as a jaded expression of inappropriate physical desire. But perhaps the message of the mirrors was the exact opposite: Don't look at me only as I appear now in the mirror; look at me also as you saw me as a bride and look at me as the mother of your future children. The present snapshot is only a small part of the story; human history, and certainly Jewish history, dare not be judged only by the picture of the moment!

Looking at people is an art, and when the prophet describes how the future Messiah will look at people, he stresses that "...he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes..." (Is. 11:3). We must learn to see within, and not only to look without.

Similarly, we find the admonition in the Ethics of the Fathers, "Judge all people favorably" (Avot 1:6). This phrase can also be taken to mean: "Judge the entire person, all of the person [kol ha'adam], her manifold activities as well as her inner self – and then you will come to a favorable assessment."

Thus we see the central role of the washstand in the structure of the Sanctuary: the faith of the Jewish women despite the fact that their husbands' spirits were broken, and the importance for the priest to look deep and hard at himself as well as others to ascertain a true and full picture. In the final analysis, our reflection in a mirror is only a small part of who we really are. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Shemot: Defining a Nation, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 13th century Barcelona) points out that the conclusion of the book of Shemot, with its detailed recording of the

construction and expenditures involved in the completion of the Mishkan/Tabernacle, places the Jewish people as a whole at the level of spirituality that was present in the homes of our patriarchs and matriarchs at the conclusion of the previous book of Bereshith.

Just as the spirit of the Lord hovered over the tents of our forbearers, so now did it become recognizable and present amongst the nation of Israel. Constructed for that purpose, the spirit of the Lord dwelled within the Mishkan/Tabernacle. There is an important message contained in this observation. This Jewish tradition teaches us that there are two places, so to speak, where the Lord's presence may be experienced and should be cultivated. God's glory fills the entire universe; He is omnipresent. But the puny human being cannot encompass the entire universe in all of its vastness and complexity. We need a personal God that we can relate to somehow.

That God can be found, according to Jewish tradition, in two places in our small and narrow world. One place is in our home, our family and our daily lives. The second place of Godly encounter is in the house of worship and study and Torah service. That is our substitute Mishkan/Tabernacle where the spirit of God hovers over those buildings and is recognizable to us only if we are attuned and sensitive enough to experience it. These two pillars of Jewish life have accompanied us on our long journey in the world – and through our history.

Both of these bastions of Jewish strength and vitality – the home and the synagogue/study hall – the meeting places so to speak of Israel with its God, are under siege and attack in today's modern society. The home, marriage, children and the sense of family has given way to relationships, moving-in and out, later marriages, a large number of divorces and spousal abuse, and the sacrifice of children and family on the altars of career and hedonism. Without strong Jewish families there cannot be a strong State of Israel or a viable Jewish nation. Certainly intermarriage has eroded the concept of Jewish family but even when this does not occur, the bonds of family are frayed by television, the internet and the society generally. Sometimes even well meaning gestures are counterproductive.

During my years as a rabbi in Miami Beach we always had many Shabat guests and because of that, contact between us and our own young children was pretty much eliminated. One Friday one of our younger daughters said to my wife: "Mommy, are children also guests?" We got the message and then made certain that one of the Shabat meals would be exclusively with our children.

The synagogue also has lost much since it became the matter of the whims and comfort of the attendees and no longer the House of God where He is

to be glimpsed and served according to His wishes as expressed in Torah and halacha. I hope that the message of the Ramban will certainly not be lost upon us. ©2025 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Erecting the Mishkan

After Moshe set up the Mishkan and anointed the Kohanim, it was time to build the Mishkan and place all of the keilim (objects) in their proper place. The Torah states: "It was in the first month of the second year on the first of the month, that the Mishkan was erected. Moshe erected the Mishkan; he put down the sockets, and placed its beams and inserted its bars, and erected its pillars. He spread out the Tent-spread over the Tabernacle-spread and put the cover of the Tent-spread on it from above, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He took and placed the Testimony into the Aron and placed the staves on the Aron, and he placed the lid on the Aron from above. He brought the Aron into the Mishkan, and he placed the Parochet (curtain) screen, and it screened the Aron of Testimony, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He put the Shulchan (table) in the Tent of Meeting on the northern side of the Mishkan, outside the Parochet. He arranged on it the arrangement of bread before Hashem, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He placed the Menorah in the Tent of Meeting, opposite the Shulchan, on the southern side of the Mishkan. He lit the lamps before Hashem, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He placed the Golden Mizbe'ach (altar) in the Tent of Meeting, in front of the Parochet. And he caused incense spices to go up in smoke on it, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He placed the screen of the entrance of the Tabernacle. He placed the Mizbe'ach of the olah-offering at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and he brought up on it the olah-offering and the meal-offering, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He placed the Kiyor (washing basin) between the Tent of Meeting and the Mizbe'ach, and there he put water for washing. And Moshe and Aharon and his sons would wash from it their hands and feet. When they would come to the Tent of Meeting and when they would approach the Mizbe'ach, they would wash, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. He erected the Courtyard all around the Mishkan and the Mizbe'ach, and he placed the screen of the gate of the Courtyard; so Moshe completed his work."

Our enlarged section begins with the words, "It was in the first month of the second year on the first of the month." The words as written in the command form, however, in the paragraph before our section, say, "On the day of the first month on the first of the

month erect the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting." Most other places in the Torah, the word "baYom, on the day," is not said. Instead, it would say, "In the first month on the first of the month." The Ramban suggests that the command here was to permanently erect the Mishkan on the first day of the first month, Nisan. This was the eighth day of the inauguration process of the Kohanim. Moshe understood by this command that he should erect the Mishkan and take it down each of the prior seven days so that the Leviim would see the process and would be prepared to take over that responsibility. On the last day of the eight-day ceremony, Moshe permanently established the Mishkan and retreated from that responsibility again. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out that this was the first of Nisan, the birthday of Yitzchak. Some suggest that the command to build the Mishkan was issued on Yom HaKippur, which is six months earlier in Tishrei. HaRav Sorotzkin likens this to the difference of opinion as to the date of the Creation. This is a difference which is noted in Tanchumah Terumah between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. Tosefot says that both are correct; Hashem first thought to create the world in Tishrei, but he did not begin until Nisan. The Mishkan was thought of in Tishrei but was not completed until Nisan.

Our words follow a paragraph that lists Hashem's commands concerning the erecting of the Mishkan. Each aspect of the Mishkan was erected by Moshe and then the words "as Hashem commanded Moshe" were written. The Ba'al HaTurim explains that these words are repeated eighteen times during this final establishment of the Temple, and, for that reason, our Rabbis established the eighteen blessings of the Silent Devotion, the Shemonah Esrei. When the command to establish the chatzer, the courtyard around the Mishkan, was fulfilled by Moshe, the Torah did not say, "as Hashem commanded Moshe." Only after Moshe had interrupted the erection of the Mishkan in order to teach Aron and his sons about the different "korbanot, sacrifices," they were to bring, did Hashem include the words, "as Hashem commanded Moshe."

Our section not only deals with the erection of the Mishkan but the placement of each of the objects in the Mishkan or in the Courtyard. Moshe followed a logical progression based on the separation between different levels of holiness. First Moshe established the borders of the Mishkan by erecting the walls with their sockets, beams, and pillars. Once the frame was established, Moshe then placed the Holy Ark with its contents into the place of the Holy of Holies. Moshe then set up the Parochet, the Curtains which acted to separate the Holy of Holies from the Holy. Moshe then placed the objects that were to be in the Holy into their proper positions. Moshe erected a curtain at the front of the Mishkan to separate the Holy from the Mizbe'ach, which he placed near the opening of the

Mishkan. Moshe then placed the Kiyor outside of the area so that the Kohanim and Leviim could wash their hands and feet before they entered. Finally, Moshe established the curtains of the Chatzer, the courtyard in which the B'nei Yisrael could come with their sacrifices. This process also directed the Leviim to build the Mishkan and to take it down in the same proper order which would maintain a permanent separation between objects and places based on that level of holiness.

Each day that Moshe erected the Mishkan during the inauguration phase of demonstrating the process to the Kohanim and Leviim, Moshe did not as yet anoint the Kohanim or any of the objects of the Mishkan with oil. This was saved to the final time that Moshe erected the Mishkan when he turned over the responsibilities to the Kohanim and Leviim. Moshe waited until Hashem told him a second time to take the Kohanim.

When King Solomon built the First Temple, he followed this same guideline. We, too, must separate the holy in society from the unholy that surrounds us. Just as the major objects which bless our lives are found in the Holy, so should we guide our lives to the holiness we seek. May we be blessed, through our concentration on the Holy, with the ability to approach the Holy of Holies, wherein the Torah and the Shechinah rest. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

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The Temple Treasurer

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

During Temple times, the Temple's treasury (*Hekdesh*) was allowed to own Canaanite slaves, just as a private individual could. Therefore, we would have expected that just as a slave owned by a private individual could buy his freedom from his master, so too a slave owned by the Temple treasury could pay the treasurer (*gizbar*) and buy his freedom.

However, this is not the case. The treasurer of the Temple may not grant a slave release. Rather, he must sell the slave to a private individual. The slave can then buy his freedom from the new owner (*Gittin* 38b). Why is the treasurer of the Temple empowered to deal with all monetary matters, but not empowered to free a slave?

Rashi explains that the relationship of the Temple to a slave is different from that of a private individual to a slave. The Temple treasury does not actually acquire the body of the slave (*kinyan ha-guf*), but only his monetary value (*kinyan damim*). Since the treasury does not own the slave's body, it cannot free him. The Meiri offers a different explanation. The reason the treasurer cannot free the slave is because only the slave's owner can free him, and he is not the slave's owner. The true owner of *Hekdesh* is the Almighty Himself, while the treasurer is just a functionary.

Tosafot explains that if we give the treasurer the power to sell a slave, some might suspect him of not being sufficiently careful with *Hekdesh* assets. However, this interpretation is a bit surprising, as there is a principle that we trust the treasurers of *Hekdesh* to be acting faithfully. If we trust them with all other monetary matters, why should freeing slaves be any different? The reason may be as follows. We trust the treasurers implicitly as far as straight monetary matters are concerned. However, when it comes to freeing a slave – granting liberty to a human being – there are emotional and ideological concerns that may come into play. People might suspect that the treasurer's altruistic wish to free a slave would lead him to do something disadvantageous to *Hekdesh*, for example accepting a lower price than he should for the slave. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And they brought the Mishkan to Moshe; the tent and all its implements, its hooks, its beams, its bars, and its pillars and its sockets." (Shmos 39:33) Having invested their hearts and souls in preparing all the items necessary for the Mishkan, the Jews were anxious for it to be erected. They were unable to do so, however, says the Midrash Tanchuma, quoted by Rashi. The beams were too heavy for a human to lift and put into place, so the people turned to Moshe.

They brought him all the parts of the Mishkan and its furnishings, and laid them out before him (imagine a Mishkan from IKEA.) It was then up to Moshe to put it all together. The reason for this, as stated in the Midrash, was that Moshe had no part in preparing the items for the Mishkan. He had conveyed the commandments, but not actually built anything. Therefore, Hashem saved this job for him, to actually put it up.

Moshe argued to Hashem that the people were correct, that it was a task beyond human ability, but Hashem told Moshe to place his hands on the items and they would lift up on their own, but it would appear to everyone that he was lifting and placing the heavy beams. This all makes sense, except for one thing.

If the beams were too heavy for them to lift and stand up, why bring everything to Moshe, instead of asking him to come to the jobsite and see the issue? And if they were bringing the krashim beams to Moshe, why did they bring all the other items? They could have let Moshe erect the beams, and then brought in all the rest.

It seems that with all their enthusiasm, when the Jews hit a snag, they were shut down completely. They had seen such Divine assistance, that when something went wrong, they couldn't handle it. Essentially, when they brought everything to Moshe,

they were throwing up their hands and giving up.

Moshe realized that he couldn't do it either, and reached out to Hashem. He was told, "I'm going to handle everything. You just make it look like you're doing it."

What a powerful concept! Even Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest man who ever lived, had his limitations. However, what empowered him to overcome them was his awareness that Hashem has no limits. He can do whatever He wishes, and enables us to have a role in fulfilling them. Not only did Moshe then put up the kerashim, but he placed all the other items inside, all by himself, more than he had been asked to do.

When we think we've hit a brick wall, and can go no further, we need to remember this message from Hashem. "I will do it all; you just put your hands into the work." Our task is not to get results, but to make our best efforts. And yes, to not be deterred when something doesn't work out as we think it should.

A young boy came home from Hebrew school and his mother asked him what he'd learned. "We learned about the Jews leaving Egypt," he said. "When they got to the Red Sea, they built a suspension bridge, loaded it down with dynamite, and crossed to the other side.

When the Egyptians came, the Jews waited until they were all on the bridge, then they blew it up and killed all the Egyptians." The mother looked down at the boy with a look of disapproval on her face. "Young man," she said, "I don't think that's the story your teacher told you."

He looked up at her with a smile and replied, "That's true, but you'd NEVER believe the story she DID tell us!" © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

When I look back on my youth, I am often reminded of the many "principles of life" that we were taught in school as truisms that turned out to be patently false. "You better learn math; you won't always have a calculator!" I'm pretty sure the vast majority of people in the developed world are welded to a device that will calculate the square root 375,769 in the blink of an eye (even if most primarily use it to watch cat videos).

"You need to learn and practice cursive penmanship in order to be taken seriously as an adult." Hardly. Another classic from English class: "'i' before 'e' except after 'c.'" But what about the following sentence: Your foreign scientist neighbor Keith receives eight counterfeit sleighs from caffeinated weightlifters.

"You'll never make a living playing computer games." Pretty sure Silicon Valley was built by those folk. "You need to get good grades in school in order to become successful and wealthy." Yet, in law school,

the maxim is: "Most A and B students end up working for the C and D students."

The list is endless: "Pluto is a planet," "margarine is healthier for you than butter or eggs," "in 20 years, quantum entanglement will allow people to teleport"... yep -- I'm still waiting for that one to materialize.

Many of the above maxims are -- at best -- half-truths. Perhaps it is just part of the human condition to try to simplify life by looking at facts superficially, though it often leads to shallow and erroneous conclusions. Unsurprisingly, we do this in many areas of our lives including some of our long-held religious beliefs.

Perhaps the greatest example of this is a general misunderstanding of the "yetzer hora -- evil inclination." We tend to view certain things as good or bad, for example, Satan and the Angel of Death are both generally perceived as "bad." But living in a theocentric universe we need to keep in mind that they too are messengers of the Almighty, and they are merely doing what they were created to do.

In order to fully grasp these concepts, particularly when it comes to understanding the purpose of the yetzer hora, we need to pay careful attention to what the sages teach us. This is crucial to understanding ourselves, who we are, and what life is truly about.

There is a rather astonishing teaching from the sages related to this. On reflecting on the events of the sixth day of creation the Torah says, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). The sages are bothered by this description as every other day the Torah simply writes "good"; what was it about the sixth day that was VERY good?

According to Rav Nachman this refers to the creation of the good and evil inclinations (see Bereshit Rabbah 9:7). He explains; "Without an evil inclination man would not marry, build a home, have children, or run a business." Rabbi Shmuel says that this refers to the Angel of Death -- and he goes on to explain why this creation is called VERY good (see ibid 9:10). The idea that the Angel of Death and evil inclination are catalysts for living a "good" life is obviously a different perspective from what most people harbor.

Likewise, in the Talmud we find a whole discussion regarding the Men of the Great Assembly, who were active at the end of the First Temple and beginning of the Second Temple. Upon seeing the decline in spirituality of the general population, they prayed to eliminate the evil inclination. The Talmud says that their prayers were granted, but for the next three days not even a single egg was laid throughout the land (Yoma 69b). They quickly changed their request.

In reality, the "evil inclination" merely

represents one's self-interest. The Almighty saw it fit to create a world wherein man chooses between good and evil, and this is the essence of his existence in the physical world, because it is the source of man earning a reward (or punishment) and thus self-interest "makes the world go round." One can choose selfish pleasures and meaningless endeavors in pursuit of ephemeral physical gratification, or choose to become a better person and cater to his holy soul and grow in that way - which would be in line with the yetzer tov -- the "good inclination."

The Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) makes a remarkable statement, "The Almighty told the Jewish people, 'I have created the yetzer hora and I created the Torah as it's antidote.'" Fascinatingly, the word the Talmud uses for antidote is "tavlin -- spice." This alludes to a very deep concept.

According to the Talmud, the essence of the world is, quite surprisingly, the evil inclination and, just as salt is used to "cure" meat from further deterioration, the Torah is needed to ameliorate the effects of the yetzer hora. In this way the Torah is there to adjust the essence of man, which God created to be rooted in his self-interests -- his good inclination and his evil inclination. There was a fascinating study done in 2008 that clearly demonstrates this. Researchers presented rats with food they enjoyed, requiring a simple lever press to obtain it. Under normal conditions, rats would eagerly press the lever and consume the food. However, when researchers eliminated dopamine neurons through a neurotoxin, an interesting pattern emerged.

The dopamine-depleted rats could still enjoy the food when it was directly in front of them. They would eat it and show signs of pleasure. But when placed just one body length away from the lever, these same rats wouldn't make the minimal effort to obtain the food. The ability to provide for themselves was quite literally right in front of them, yet they didn't feel motivated, and they chose to die instead. In contrast, rats with intact dopamine systems would readily move to the lever, press it, eat, and thrive.

In another study, when the pleasure center was overstimulated, they chose to only experience the dopamine pleasure, and they starved to death because eating was less pleasurable than the intoxicating dopamine (much in the same way a crack addict stops eating).

We can see that everything in this world is driven by selfish desires necessary for balance -- and the Torah allows us to channel them into positive growth. When Dr. Henry Jekyll, in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, figures out how to separate his primal inclination and his moral inclination into two separate beings, he creates a monster on the one hand, and a feeble wimp on the other. In reality, there is no way to separate the

two -- they are merely two sides of the same coin, and they are both necessary. We find a similar lesson in this week's Torah portion.

"He made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of those that congregated; the ones that had congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (Exodus 38:3).

The copper washstand, otherwise known as the kiyor, was used primarily to dispense water onto the hands and feet of the Cohanim or "priestly caste" to sanctify them prior to their service in the Tabernacle. The great medieval Biblical commentator Rashi (ad loc) relates a fascinating incident pertaining to its creation:

"The daughters of Israel had in their possession copper mirrors which they would look into when they would beautify themselves, even these mirrors (which had great sentimentality to them) they did not withhold from bringing for the contribution toward the Tabernacle. Moses rejected them because they were made for the evil inclination. The Holy One, Blessed is He, said: 'Accept them, for they are dearest to Me of all, for through them the women established legions in Egypt.'"

Rashi goes on to detail how the women used these mirrors to entice their husbands to procreate, and presumably Moses was against accepting the mirrors because they were used for impure purposes.

Many commentaries question why Moses was willing to accept all sorts of personal items from the women including "armbands, nose-rings, finger-rings, and chastity belts" (Exodus 35:22), yet initially refused their mirrors. Aside from the fact that most of those items were used to make themselves more attractive, the chastity belts in particular seem to be wholly inappropriate for use in the Tabernacle. So the commentators ask, "Why did Moses accept those items yet reject the mirrors?" (see Maharal ad loc).

The gift of the mirrors was different from all the other donations made to the Tabernacle. Every other item given was melted down to be used wherever it was needed. But the women came "en masse" to make a special request. They wanted to designate their mirrors to be a perpetual monument to what they had done in Egypt. They wanted the kiyor, which symbolizes purity and sanctification, to be created solely from their intact mirrors in recognition of their initial use in building the Jewish nation.

Moses had happily accepted all types of personal items as donations to the Tabernacle, even those items that were of a VERY personal nature. But to set aside a specific vessel to remember something that he felt was a tool of the evil inclination, Moses did not agree. He argued with the women and rejected their plea.

The Torah tells us that the women vehemently protested, and the Torah even refers to it as "the mirrors of those that congregated." This gathering was

to protest Moses' rejection and refusal to give their efforts to build the Jewish nation a lasting testament. The Almighty tells Moses that these mirrors were most precious of all and were therefore quite appropriate for the vessel that provided the waters of purification to the Cohanim. © 2025 Rabbi Y. Zweig & shabbatshalom.org

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

It's intriguing that, just as Chazal place importance on being *masmich geulah litfillah* -- placing a reference to redemption immediately before prayer, i.e. the *amidah* (Berachos 4b, 9b) -- we find something similar in the Torah itself.

The first part of *Sefer Shemos*, the Torah's book of *geulah*, concerns, of course, *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the redemption from Egypt. And the latter parshios deal with the *mishkan*, the place of *korbanos*, which were accompanied by, and eventually replaced by, *tefillah*. And the *sefer* is followed by *Vayikra*, the *sefer* of *korbanos*.

What's more, the segue into the concept of *tefillah* is hinted at as well in the final parsha of *Shemos*. As the *Yerushalmi* notes, there are 18 times in *parshas Pekudei* that the phrase "as Hashem commanded Moshe" is used, corresponding to the 18 *brachos* of the *amidah*. (And the phrase "as Hashem commanded" occurs without an object once, which could correspond to the added nineteenth *bracha*, *birchas hamanim*.)

And, although the *Gemara* regards the introduction to the *amidah*, the short prayer "Hashem, open my lips and let my mouth speak Your praises," as part of *tefillah*, it, too, may itself hint at the *geulah*, since the word for "my lips" is rooted in the word for the seashore, the "al *sfas hayam*" of *kri'as Yam Suf* we reference in *Shacharis* leading up to the *bracha* of *Go'al Yisrael*.

Why being *masmich geulah litfillah* is a *desideratum* isn't obvious, but it might be because, as we are about to beseech Hashem, *hakaras hatov*, recognition of His favor toward us, embodied in the concept of *geulah*, is something on which to concentrate..

May our *tefillos* lead, in turn, to the *geulah ha'asidah*. © 2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and *torah.org*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In the portion of *Pekudei* a reckoning of the work done in the Tabernacle is recorded. Interesting, is the Hebrew word for reckoning—*pekudei*. (Exodus 38:21) As I have often pointed out in these weekly Torah discussions, one key to understanding the meaning of a word in the Torah is by analyzing the first time it is found.

In the story of Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah

we first come across the term *p-k-d*. The Torah tells us that for many years, Avraham and Sarah could not have children. Finally Sarah does give birth. In the words of the Torah, "and the Lord remembered Sarah as He had spoken...and Sarah conceived and bore a son to Avraham." (Genesis 21:1) The word "remembered" is *pakad*. Somehow then *pekudei* is interwoven with birth as the text indicates that G-d had remembered Sarah.

It follows therefore, that *Pekudei*, the accounting of the Tabernacle, is associated with birth. Perhaps it can be suggested that just as a mother plays the crucial role in the development of the fetus and the nurturing of its well being, so too does G-d serve as a Mother in His protection of the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word for mercy is *rachum*, from the word *rechem* that means womb. G-d's love is the love of the womb. It is a mother's love that is infinite and unconditional, much like the love displayed by G-d in protecting the Tabernacle.

Another parallel comes to mind. By definition birth involves a sense of history. When a child is born there is recognition of historic continuity, of the infant being part of a continuum of the family's past history. So too, the *Mishkan*. In many ways, the building of the Tabernacle was the crescendo of Israel's past, the culmination of a dream that Israel as a nation would have a place in which to worship G-d.

Although the birth of a child is often the end of a time of feelings of joy and anticipation, it is also a beginning. It is the start of hopes and wishes that the child grow to full maturity and impact powerfully on the Jewish people and all humankind. This is also the case with the *Mishkan*. In many cases of buildings, many involved see the beauty of the actual structure to be an end in itself. But buildings are not ends, they are rather the means to reach higher, to feel more powerfully the deeper presence of G-d. The *Mishkan* is associated with birth for it reminds us that even as a tabernacle or any synagogue is dedicated, our responsibility is to go beyond the bricks and mortar to make sure that the space is infused with spirituality.

The birth of a child is a time to re-evaluate our priorities and look ahead toward the dream of years of growth. The *Mishkan*, and in the same way our individual structures of worship, should, in the same way, make us reflect on our values and aspire to higher spiritual levels of holiness. © 2016 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of *Yeshivat Chovevei Torah*, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

