

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he Torah in Parshat Vayakhel, which describes the making of the Mishkan, goes out of its way to emphasize the role women played in it: "The men accompanied the women, and those who wanted to make a donation brought bracelets, earrings, finger rings, and body ornaments, all made of gold." (35:22)

"Every skilled woman put her hand to spinning, and they [all] brought the spun yarn of sky-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool and fine linen. Highly skilled women volunteers also spun the goats' wool." (35:25-26).

"Every man and woman among the Israelites who felt an urge to give something for all the work that God had ordered through Moses, brought a donation for God." (35:29)

Indeed the emphasis is even greater than it seems in translation, because of the unusual locution in verse 22, Vayavo-u ha-anashim al hanashim, which implies that the women came to make their donations first, and the men merely followed their lead (Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rabbenu Bachye).

This is all the more striking since the Torah implies that the women refused to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf (see the commentaries to Ex. 32:2). The women had a sense of judgment in the religious life-what is true worship, and what false-that the men lacked.

Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550-1619) makes the further point that since the Tabernacle was an atonement for the Golden Calf, the women had no need to contribute at all, since it was the men not the women who needed atonement. None the less, women gave, and did so before the men.

Most moving, though, by far is the cryptic verse: "He [Betzael] made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of the dedicated women [ha-tzove'ot] who congregated at the entrance of the Communion Tent." [Ex. 38:8]

The sages (in Midrash Tanhuma) told a story about this. This is how Rashi tells it: "Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into when they adorned themselves. Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts].

The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt." When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labour, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way they aroused their husbands' desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: "Under the apple tree I aroused you" (Song 8:5). This is [the meaning of] what is bema'rot hatzove'ot [lit., the mirrors of those who set up legions]. From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made."

The story is this. The Egyptians sought not merely to enslave, but also to put an end to, the people of Israel. One way of doing so was to kill all male children. Another was simply to interrupt normal family life. The people, both men and women, were labouring all day. At night, says the Midrash, they were forbidden to return home. They slept where they worked. The intention was to destroy both privacy and sexual desire, so that the Israelites would have no more children.

The women realised this, and decided to frustrate Pharaoh's plan. They used mirrors to make themselves attractive to their husbands. The result was that intimate relations resumed. The women conceived and had children (the "legions" referred to in the word tzove'ot). Only because of this was there a new generation of Jewish children. The women, by their faith, courage and ingenuity, secured Jewish survival.

The Midrash continues that when Moses commanded the Israelites to bring offerings to make the tabernacle, some brought gold, some silver, some bronze, some jewels. But many of the women had nothing of value to contribute except the mirrors they had brought with them from Egypt. These they brought to Moses, who recoiled in disgust. What, he thought, have these cheap objects, used by women to make themselves look attractive, to do with the sanctuary and the sacred? God rebuked Moses for daring to think this way, and ordered him to accept them.

The story is powerful in itself. It tells us, as do so many other midrashim, that without the faith of women, Jews and Judaism would never have survived.

But it also tells us something absolutely fundamental to the Jewish understanding of love in the religious life.

In his impressive recent book *Love: A History* (2011) the philosopher Simon May writes: "If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew." Judaism sees love as supremely physical and spiritual. That is the meaning of "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might" (Deut. 6:5). This is not the language of meditation or contemplation, philosophical or mystical. It is the language of passion.

Even the normally cerebral Maimonides writes this about the love of God: "What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love God with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one's soul shall be knit up with the love of God, such that it is continually enraptured by it, like a lovesick individual whose mind is never free from passion for a particular woman and is enraptured by her at all times... Even intenser should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him. They should be enraptured by this love at all times." (Laws of Repentance, 10:5)

This is the love we find in passages like Psalm 63:2, "My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." Only because the sages thought about love this way, did they take it for granted that The Song of Songs—an extremely sensual series of love poems—was about the love between God and Israel. Rabbi Akiva called it "the holy of holies" of religious poetry.

It was Christianity, under the influence of classical Greece, that drew a distinction between eros (love as intense physical desire) and agape (a calm, detached love of humanity-in-general and things-in-general) and declared the second, not the first, to be religious. It was this self-same Greek influence that led Christianity to read the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit as a story of sinful sexual desire—an interpretation that should have no place whatsoever in Judaism.

Simon May speaks about the love of God in Judaism as being characterised by "intense devotion; absolute trust; fear of his power and presence; and rapturous, if often questioning, absorption in his will... Its moods are a combination of the piety of a vassal, the intimacy of friends, the fidelity of spouses, the dependence of a child, the passion of lovers..." He later adds, "The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and 'an eye for an eye,' while the Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history."

The Midrash dramatises this contrast between eros and agape as an argument between God and Moses. Moses believes that closeness to God is about celibacy and purity. God teaches him otherwise, that

passionate love, when offered as a gift to God, is the most precious love of all. This is the love we read about in Shir ha-Shirim. It is the love we hear in Yedid Nefesh,<sup>1</sup> the daring song we sing at the beginning and toward the end of Shabbat. When the women offered God the mirrors through which they aroused their husbands' love in the dark days of Egypt, God told Moses, "These are more precious to Me than anything else." The women understood, better than the men, what it means to love God "with all your heart and all your soul and all your might." *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

“H e 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) The Sanctuary and all of its furnishings are described in exquisite and sometimes seemingly repetitive detail, but the laver, the large basin within which the priests sanctified themselves by washing their hands and feet prior to each divine service, is an exception to this rule.

Several aspects distinguish this washbasin. First of all, virtually all the other items in the Sanctuary are given exact measurements, but here the Torah speaks in general terms. The precise dimensions of the laver and its base are not given. Are not these details important, and if not – why not?

Perhaps the answer to this question is found in the latter part of this same verse, where we are told that the laver was made of the “mirrors of the service women.” According to R. Samson Rafael Hirsch’s Torah commentary, the phrase “ba-marot ha-tzovot” (mirrors of the service women) suggests that the copper mirrors were not melted down at all, but that the laver was “...fitted together almost without any alteration at all, so that it would be recognizable that the basin consisted actually of mirrors” (Commentary to Ex. 38:8).

Even if this first question is answered, a second question comes in its wake. Of all contributions to the Sanctuary, why should the mirrors retain their unique identity? Does it not seem odd that the very accouterment found in every woman’s possession, the very symbol of vanity, would find a new incarnation as a central piece inside the Sanctuary? Indeed, without first stopping at the laver to wash their hands and feet, the priests could not begin the Temple service.

<sup>1</sup> *Yedid Nefesh* is usually attributed to Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri (1533-1600). However Stefan Reif (*The Hebrew Manuscripts at Cambridge University Libraries*, 1997, p. 93) refers to an earlier appearance of the song in a manuscript by Samuel ben David ben Solomon, dated *circa* 1438.

How “vanities” could become such a significant aspect of our Sanctuary is the subject of a fascinating debate between two major commentaries.

Ibn Ezra writes as follows: “It is the custom of women to beautify themselves, to look at their faces every morning in copper or glass mirrors... And there were in Israel women who served God, and decided to turn away from all the physical material blandishments of this world. They therefore gave their mirrors away to the Sanctuary as a gift offering because they no longer had the need to beautify themselves. From that time on they would arrive daily at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting to pray and to listen to the details of the commandments. That is the reason why the biblical text says they came in hordes [armies], tzovot, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting; they were so numerous.” (Ibn Ezra, on Exodus 38:8)

Ibn Ezra is here describing the first women’s prayer service and study hall (bet midrash) at the door of the Sanctuary’s Tent of Meeting, a remarkable fact in itself, especially since he maintains that it was so popular that it attracted “armies” of women. But his main point is to stress an ascetic aspect of the women’s relationship to God. Since mirrors represent the physical desires of this world, once the women acquired the higher spiritual plane of involvement in prayer and study, they no longer had any use for the mirrors and gave them away to the Sanctuary.

For Rashi, however, the inclusion of the women’s mirrors inside the Sanctuary is the story of a religious metamorphosis, not the rejection of the physical but rather the sanctification of the physical, and herein, it seems to me, lies the true message of the sanctuary. Rashi explains that when the daughters of Israel brought a gift offering of the actual mirrors, they were initially rejected by Moses because they were made for the evil instinct. But God said to Moses: “Accept them; these are more beloved to me than anything else. Through these mirrors the women established many armies in Egypt” [a play on the word tzovot, service women, which literally means armies, and a reference to the armies of children whom the women brought forth.] When the husbands would come home exhausted from backbreaking work, their wives would bring them food and drink. And they would take the mirrors, and would appear together with their husbands in the reflection of the mirror. Thus they would entice their husbands and they would become pregnant (Rashi, on Exodus 38:8).

According to Rashi, the mirrors represent the unswerving faith of the Jewish women, their supreme confidence in a Jewish future. After all, the Israelites were being enslaved and their male babies thrown into the Nile during the Egyptian subjugation. Logic certainly dictated not having any children, refusing to bring innocent babes into a life of suffering and possible death. But there was also a tradition of the Covenant of

the Pieces (Gen. 15), a promise of redemption, a charge to teach the world ethical monotheism.

Consider what would have happened if the Israelite women had not found a way to entice their husbands. Jewish history would have ended almost before it began, in the very first exile of Egypt, devoid of a next generation of Jewish continuity. In effect, the transformation of these mirrors of desire into the laver of purification is the Torah’s way of rewarding the women for their devotion and explaining to future generations the biblical ideal of the sanctification of the physical, the uplifting of the material. The key here is that they looked into the mirrors and saw themselves and their husbands. They looked into the mirrors and saw armies of a Jewish future. Had they seen only themselves, and not their husbands and their progeny, their place in Jewish history would hardly have been as exalted.

Which of these interpretations is easier to accept? Perhaps the following Talmudic passage can clarify matters. We read in Nazir an account of Shimon the Just, High Priest and one of the last Men of the Great Assembly: “All of my life I never ate from a Nazirite’s sacrificial offering, except once, when I saw a Nazirite coming towards me from the south. He was beautiful of eyes, goodly of appearance, with magnificent curly hair. I said to him, ‘My son, why have you decided to destroy such beautiful hair [because ultimately a Nazirite gives his hair as a sacrifice upon the altar]?’ He said to me, ‘I was a shepherd... and I once went to draw water from the well and I looked at my reflection in the water. An evil instinct began to overcome me [because I fell in love with myself]. And I said [to the evil instinct], empty one, do you not realize that ultimately you will just be worms and maggots? And I took an oath to become a Nazirite.’ And Shimon the Just said, ‘I stood and I kissed him on the forehead, and I said to him, “May all Nazirites be like you.”’” (Nazir 4b)

Why was this Nazirite different from all other Nazirites? Implicit in Shimon the Just’s account is that all others who took this ascetic vow were in some way violating an inherent principle in the Torah by denying themselves what the Torah permits – the rationale, according to many commentaries, behind the Nazirite’s sin offering. But this particular Nazirite was doing what he had to do in order to save himself from the narcissistic danger of becoming attracted to the mysterious depths of his own reflection. He was on the way to a life of egoistic self-love and self-absorption which he felt could only be put in check by his becoming a Nazirite.

How different is Rashi’s brilliant description of the mirrors. The greatness of the Jewish women in Egypt is that they looked at the reflection not only of themselves but of their husbands as well. And because they saw their husbands as well as themselves, they

also saw, and provided for, Israelite future and Israelite destiny. They were concerned not only for their own pleasure, but also for the material pleasure of husband and wife which is only realized to its greatest degree in the creation of children, who represent personal and national continuity and future.

An amazing Talmudic text brings home this point to a striking degree: "Rav Katina said: When the Jewish people would go up to Jerusalem during the festivals, the keepers of the Sanctuary would roll back the curtain covering the holy ark, and would reveal to the Jews who came up to Jerusalem, the cherubs, which were in the form of a male and female embracing each other. And they would say to them, to the Jews: 'See the love which God has for you, like the love of a male and female.'" (Yoma 54a)

And the cherubs had the faces of small children, symbol of Jewish continuity. Love for another, expressed in the highest form by love of lover for beloved, husband for wife, is the greatest manifestation of sanctity, and it is precisely this male-female attraction which has the power to secure our Jewish eternity.

The Sanctuary is sanctified by the mirrors of the women in Egypt, who taught, by their example, how to turn the most physical human drive into the highest act of divine service. In a very real sense, the Sanctuary itself, replete with intricately detailed expert craftsmanship, exquisite and expensive ornamentation, and gold and silver filigreed ritual objects, was similarly an attempt to take the very basic human passion for gold and beauty, which so perverted the Israelites at the incident of the golden calf, and utilize this very materialistic drive to inspire them to divine service. "And let them make among Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell within them." *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*

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

## **Spinning Wool**

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**S**pinning wool is one of the thirty nine labors that one is forbidden to do on Shabbat. It is actually one of the labors that are explicitly mentioned in the Torah. "Every wise hearted woman spun with her hands" and "All the women whose hearts inspired them with wisdom spun the goat hair" (Exodus 35:25,26) The essence of this labor is the gathering of small amounts of wool or cotton with one's finger tips or with a spindle to form thread. The derivation (toldah) of this labor according to one view is the forming of braids of dough and creating them into Challah.

The spinning in the Tabernacle was very special in that the wool was spun while it was still

attached to the goat before the goat was sheared. Only the women who had such special wisdom were able to accomplish this; among ordinary people, this knowledge was not known. Thus anyone who would perform this labor on Shabbat, (as these women did) would not be transgressing since it is not the normal way of spinning wool.

Why did the women spin the wool this way? Some point out the zeal of these women to fulfill the Mitzva even before the animal was sheared while others say that they did this to prevent defilement for we know that the wool can never be defiled (Taamei) while it is attached to a living thing.

Another fascinating interpretation is advanced by Rav Yechiel Michal from Austrobiza who posits that since spinning as these women did is permitted on the Shabbat (as stated above) then the work of the Tabernacle became transformed to a Mitzva that is not bound by time, such, that women are also obligated to do. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

**T**he haftorah for this week's parsha describes the efforts of the great King Shlomo in the construction of the First Temple. King Shlomo himself is a great and tragic figure. The attitude of the Talmud towards him is an ambivalent one.

On one hand, he is the builder of the Temple, the expander of the kingdom, the builder of great fortresses, and the administrator of twelve districts of his country. He is also the wisest of all men who understands even the sounds of animals and birds, the author of three of the great books of the Bible and someone upon whom the Divine Spirit itself has rested.

And yet on the other hand, the Talmud questions his right to immortality, criticizes his excesses and hubris, condemns his tolerance of the public support of idolatry by his foreign wives and even attributes the rise of Rome and the subsequent destruction of the Second Temple to his marrying the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Jewish legend has him driven off of his throne by a demon and having to wander in exile for part of his life. All of this naturally dims the luster of his great earlier accomplishment, of building the Temple. The haftorah parallels the parsha in the description of the work in constructing the mishkan and its artifacts, with the same type of artisanship in the creation of the Temple and its artifacts.

Shlomo, so to speak, becomes the second Moshe in supervising the building of the house of God. But, in the case of Moshe, the building of the mishkan was only one of his career's accomplishments and was dwarfed by his major accomplishment of teaching and instilling Torah within the people of Israel. The building of the Temple by Shlomo was the high point of his

career. Afterwards he slipped off the mighty pedestal of greatness that he had attained.

The Talmud teaches us that “happy are those whose later years do not shame their earlier accomplishments.” My old law school professor taught us that every lawyer makes a bad mistake at least once in his professional career. He also stated that those who are fortunate enough to make that mistake early in their career are truly blessed because they can recover and advance. Making it late in one’s professional life can be disastrous to one’s reputation and life. The reverse trend may be true of accomplishments.

Early accomplishments can be very dangerous because they set a standard and inspire a sense of self-aggrandizement that will prevent any further achievements. Only gradual ascent and mature considerations, which usually are part and parcel of advancing years, can guarantee that those early achievements become lasting and untarnished by later behavior. The comparison between the two great builders of God’s house – Moshe and Shlomo - is illustrative of this truth. Building God’s house is a great achievement in itself. Maintaining it and using it for greater spiritual influence and instruction to the people of Israel is an even greater achievement. ©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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**M**y dear, dear daughter Dena Rivka is a brilliant artist. Her particular area of expertise is papercutting. Her pieces are breathtaking in their beauty, intricate and spiritual. They have brought endless joy to brides and grooms whose ketubot she has written; her magnificent art adorns the homes of many.

When Dena was a little girl, I’d sometimes bring her to Stern College, Yeshiva University, where I taught Torah. Even at the age of four and five, she would spend the day drawing on the board. Her art, even then, was beautiful. She was a phenom. Notwithstanding, I never encouraged her to pursue art. Looking back, I’ve wondered why. Attending a charedi yeshiva in my youth, I was taught an unwritten message: art was for the Gentiles, the Greeks, and others. Jewish belief was above the sensual, above the visual. Art was a violation of the commandment as found in the Ten Declarations: “You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness [temunah]” (Exodus 20:4).

And yet, the Torah introduces us to the greatest of Jewish artists, Betzalel and his assistant Ohaliav. They were chosen to carve, weave, and embroider all that was needed for the Tabernacle. Their work

resulted in some of the greatest art ever produced in human history (35:30–35).

The meaning of their very names offers a framework in which Judaism applauds art. Betzalel is a compound of tzel and El, literally the shadow of God. His art did not replace God but was created in God’s shadow – reflecting divine radiance. Ohaliav, too, whose name is a compound of ohel Av, the tent of our Father, produced art in the shadow of God’s tent – again reflecting God’s light.

Words of prayer, rhythms of poetry, the logic of learning, and the melody of song are art forms that we recognize can catapult us to feel God’s presence. In the same way, visual art also inspires. With a goal of connection to God, artists have created visual commentaries on the liturgy. If for every paragraph of prayer, there is a picture reflecting the prayer’s meaning, the words may more easily penetrate the heart.

My daughter Dena has inspired me to understand the words of the liturgy Tzur Yisrael differently. Tzur is normatively translated “rock.” Tzur Yisrael means Rock or Strength of Israel. Can it be, however, that tzur is a play on the word tzayar, artist? In the words Tzur Yisrael, we proclaim that God is the Artist, the Artist of the world, the Artist of artists (Berachot 10a).

And we, in the spirit of imitatio Dei and following the lead of Betzalel and Ohaliav, should embrace our artistic passion, uplifted by its majestic message. ©2025 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

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

### **Gifts**

**A**fter the sin of the Golden Calf, the Torah returned to the message of the two parshiot that preceded Ki Tisa, Terumah and Tetzaveh, the commands given to Moshe to produce a portable Temple in the desert (the Mishkan) and the clothes of the Kohanim. In this week’s parasha, Moshe commands the people with the commands that he had received from Hashem. After stating the material needs of the Temple and the clothing of the Kohanim, the Torah has an unusual account of the response of the people.

The Torah states: “Every man whose heart inspired him came; and everyone whose spirit moved him brought the portion of Hashem for the work of the Tent of Meeting, for all its labor and for the garments of the holy. The men came along with the women; everyone who is generous of heart brought armband, and nose ring, and finger-ring, and kumaz – all sorts of gold ornaments – every man who raised up an offering of gold to Hashem. And any man with whom there was found turquoise wool or purple wool or scarlet wool, or

linen, or goats' hair or red-dyed ram skins of lachash skins brought them. All who set aside a portion of silver or copper brought it as a portion for Hashem; and anyone who with whom there was found shittim wood for any work of the labor brought it. Every wise-hearted woman spun with her hands; and they brought the spun yarn of the turquoise wool, and the purple wool, and the scarlet wool, and the linen. All the women whose hearts inspired them with wisdom spun the goats (hair). The princes brought the Shoham stones and the filling stones for the Eiphod and the Choshen; the spice, and the oil for illumination and for the anointing oil, and incense spices. Every man and woman whose heart moved them to bring any of the work that Hashem had commanded to make, through the hand of Moshe – the B'nei Yisrael brought a free-willed offering to Hashem."

The Ramban explains that the term, "whose heart inspired him," was used only for those men and women who actually worked with the donations to produce the required cloth or shaped the gold and silver, as opposed to those who only brought the raw gold or the raw materials needed for the Temple. He explains that the reason for such a term (inspired or stirred up) "is because they undertook to do the work, although there was no one amongst them who had learned these crafts from an instructor, or had trained his hands at all to do them." The Ramban explains that the people did not work as apprentices under a skilled Egyptian while they were slaves. These men were "inspired" in their hearts to perform the tasks necessary to produce the various objects. Even though Betzalel and others were given the task of fashioning each of the objects, the actual work was performed by the "unskilled," but inspired men.

When the Torah speaks of "the men came along with the women," the wording "vayavo'u ha'anashim al hanashim" does not definitively match the translation, and this leads to several different explanations from the commentators. The word "al" literally means "on," though its combination with other words can give it a different meaning. Our translation of "with" implies that "al" is used with the word "yad" meaning "next to." The Ba'al HaTurim uses gematria (numerical value of letters and words) to teach that this phrase means that a man and his wife came together to bring the gifts and to volunteer their work. The Ramban explains that the women were more affected by the command to bring gold and silver since most of these metals were in the form of jewelry. The Kli Yakar indicates that the word "al" here means "im, with" to indicate that the women were recognized here to praise them for their willingness to give up their jewelry. He draws a distinction between this donation of jewelry by the women and the "taking" of their jewelry by their husbands when they formed the Golden Calf. The Ohr HaChaim stressed that the gold and other metals were not from the men or from household objects, but

"armband, and nose ring, and finger-ring, and kumaz – all sorts of gold ornaments" that were all possessions of the women.

The next words of the donations tell an elongated statement concerning how the donations were brought: "And any man with whom there was found turquoise wool or purple wool or scarlet wool, or linen, or goats' hair or red-dyed ram skins of lachash skins brought them. All who set aside a portion of silver or copper brought it as a portion for Hashem; and anyone who with whom there was found shittim wood for any work of the labor brought it." When we look at the list of items that were to be donated, we might have thought that each person was to donate some of each item. This section indicates that each person brought one of the items and not necessarily all. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin uses the words, "and anyone who with whom there was found shittim wood," to prove the Midrash that Ya'akov brought shittim wood to Egypt from a grove planted by Avraham in the Holy Land. HaRav Sorotzkin does report a second opinion, which he rejects, that the wood was taken from a forest near Mt. Sinai.

The Torah explains that the women, who were skilled, wove the wool and goats' hair for the garments and the curtains used in the Temple. The term used for these women was "hochmat leiv b'yadeha, whose hearts inspired them with wisdom in her hands." The men who worked with carpentry or with gold and silver had no training, yet the women, as part of their normal activities in the home, had some skills with weaving throughout their time as slaves. The Torah also tells of the gifts of the leaders of each tribe. This is specifically mentioned because the princes had decided to wait with their gifts until the people had finished donating. They wanted to wait to complete the donations and make up any shortfall, but the people donated so much that Moshe had to stop the donations. The princes were left with donating the precious stones for the Choshen and the Eiphod.

The gifts that were given came from each person according to what he possessed. No gift was considered to be better than any other gift. The same is true of the Jewish People. Each person has a skill, a task, a level of observance. Together, we form the Jewish People, each with his part to play. When we appreciate each person for his gift to our People, we will have true love of the Jewish People and we will serve Hashem through that love. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

"**M**oshe commanded, and they proclaimed in the camp, saying, "Man and woman shall not do more work... and the nation ceased from bringing." (Exodus 36:6) Hashem's request that the people donate to the construction of an abode for His

presence in the Wilderness was met with unprecedented enthusiasm. This greatest building campaign in history saw people running to contribute, and it was complete in record time.

As people had been working very hard and diligently, when Moshe heard that they had more than enough to construct the Mishkan, he wanted to make sure no one would be dejected that they worked for nothing. Instead of telling people not to bring any more items, he said, "Don't make anything else." The people understood on their own that their items were not needed and they stayed away.

And therein lies a great praise of the Jewish People. The nation stopped bringing their items. But what about the efforts they had expended? Should all that time, effort, and money go to waste? It didn't go to waste - and that's what we are learning about the Jews in this posuk.

The alacrity with which the Jews responded to the chance to donate to the Mishkan was impressive. However, one could not be sure of the donors' motives. Maybe they wanted to bask in the reflected glory by pointing to some fixture and saying, "I made that!" Maybe they wanted to feel they had done something for Hashem, thereby reducing their debt to Him ever-so-slightly. And maybe they were purely altruistic.

From the way they responded, we know their intentions were purely motivated by their desire to do Hashem's will. He described the building He wanted, and when that was accomplished, they were happy. No one felt the need to include his or her last item, because it wasn't about them, it was about fulfilling Hashem's word.

The effort expended in preparing items was the fulfillment of Hashem's will by itself. The items didn't need to be used for the Jews to have dedicated themselves to building the Mishkan. One who sits and studies trying to understand a difficult piece of Torah has succeeded even without clarity, because he's invested his time in connecting to Hashem. That is how they looked at it, and they knew their efforts were not in vain.

*A braisa is taught (Pesachim 22b, Kiddushin 57a and elsewhere) that Shimon Ha'amsuni explained every 'es' in the Torah to include something else. However, when he reached the posuk, "Es Hashem Elokecha Tirah," which says: "(es) the L-rd your G-d shall you revere," he retracted this approach, saying there was nothing that could be considered adjunct to Hashem or included in the mitzva to revere Him; one could not fear anyone as he did the Al-mighty.*

*His students asked, "Our Master! What will become of all the previous explanations you rendered?" He responded, "As I have received reward for expounding them, I will receive reward from separating myself from an untrue approach."*

*It remained this way until R' Akiva came along*

*and said the 'es' included Talmidei Chachamim, Torah scholars. Perhaps he felt that Shimon Ha'amsuni's behavior proved that all he did and said was not for his own glory, but to fulfill the will of Hashem. In that way, he WAS a part of G-d, and so too are Torah Scholars who seek only to understand Hashem and perform His will. © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA SICHA OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN

*Translated by David Strauss*

*Edited by Sarah Rudolph*

**W**ho needs a para aduma, a red heifer, when the Temple is not standing? We seem to be managing quite well without it, despite the fact that we are all ritually impure as a result of having come into contact with a corpse. Do we have need of a para aduma today?

The truth is that this question can be raised not only regarding our own times, but even regarding the days of the Temple, when the sacrificial service was still in place. It is possible to envision an alternative reality in which not all of Israel would be pure, and yet the Temple would continue to function. A directive could be issued to sequester all the priests, and thus keep them from coming into contact with a corpse. As long as the priests refrain from touching a human corpse or an animal carcass, we could manage quite well with the rest of Israel remaining in a state of impurity. The priests would operate the Temple systems, offering sacrifices and taking full responsibility for the Divine service.

In fact, such a commandment exists for the High Priest, with a similar purpose: "He shall not go in upon [i.e., where there is] any dead body; he shall not defile himself for his father or for his mother." (Vayikra 21:11)

There are cases where we take extra precautions in order to maintain continuity of the Divine service. We keep the High Priest away from the dead so he can function without interruption, and we could have proposed a similar prohibition for all priests, allowing the rest of the people to contract ritual impurity and simply remain in that state. There would then have been no need for the complicated mechanism of the para aduma. Some of the priests would occasionally become ritually impure despite precautions, but for the most part, their fellow priests would be able to replace them in their duties. Of course, such an approach would require us to be particularly meticulous with the priests and maintain careful policies, such as exempting all priests from the laws of a mitzva -- corpse, so that they could continue serving in the Temple.

In fact, already in Parashat Ki-Tisa, we find



hints of a similar idea. God proposes that He will reconstitute the Jewish people as the seed of Moshe, from the tribe of Levi. It would not be necessary for all of us to serve God; rather, we would have representatives to act on our behalf in the religious sphere. We would not have three patriarchs, but four -- Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Levi. The Rambam says in Hilkhos Avoda Zara that even in Egypt, the Levites did not worship idols, unlike the rest of the Israelites.

What would be wrong with establishing a select group to conduct the worship of the entire nation?

There is an interesting anomaly in the law of the para aduma, to which Chazal connected (Yoma 14a) Shlomo's words: "I said: 'I will get wisdom' -- but it was far from me" (Kohelet 7:23). The para aduma does indeed purify the impure, but it also defiles the pure -- the person who sprinkles its ashes. Although this is a weaker impurity that lapses in the evening, it seems we have a mysterious paradox here, aggravated by the verses in Yechezkel that describe the redemption:

"And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure; from all your impurities, and from all your idols, I will purify you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I place within you; and I will take away the stony heart from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will place My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My ordinances, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God." (Yechezkel 36:25-28)

Had it not been for an explicit verse, it would have been impossible to say this -- but it seems that, in a manner of speaking, God becomes defiled when He purifies Israel: if God sprinkles purifying water upon Israel, the inevitable result will be His own defilement!

The Torah comes to convey the message that for every problem and crisis there is a solution. Sometimes that solution requires sacrifice or effort, but it is always possible to find it. One might have thought that impurity would be an irreversible status, for an encounter with the dead is not easily forgotten. Nonetheless, the Torah teaches that any impurity can be purified -- though it may come at the cost of the defilement of those handling the heifer.

The prophecy of Yechezkel comes to convey a similar message from a different angle: even the shame of exile and the destruction of the Temple can ultimately be rectified. It is true that the effort and the difficulty will be great, but the para aduma teaches us that anything is possible. Of course, such an approach would necessitate a foregoing of the attribute of justice to some extent. According to the standards of strict justice, the Jewish people have already incurred the penalty of exile, and by rights, they should suffer forever. Nevertheless, God is willing to forego His right

and return Israel to their land, if they repent.

It would be interesting to examine the sin of Adam in light of our discussion. Is it possible that in the end, the death penalty that was imposed on mankind will also be mitigated? We say every day, and the Rambam defines it as one of the fundamental tenets of faith, that ultimately there will be a resurrection of the dead; we can find references to this resurrection in Yechezkel. It may eventually be possible, after much repentance and effort, that even the sin of Adam will be rectified.

"For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (I Shmuel 16:7)

It is difficult to understand how God runs the world. Shmuel taught us that it is impossible for human eyes to see the reality from God's perspective. The Gemara in Yoma asks why Shaul lost his kingship after one sin, while David sinned twice yet still did not lose his kingship -- and even received a promise that his dynasty would be eternal. It seems the answer is that one must distinguish between the human perspective and the Divine perspective. This is precisely the novelty of the red heifer: while on the human level, the impurity cannot be rectified, God can rectify any error and forgive any sin.

**SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

“E very wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that Hashem has commanded.” (35:10) How did they know who was a "wise-hearted person"? R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (Central Europe; 1690-1764) explains: Moshe did not tell the volunteers every detail that Hashem had commanded regarding the Mishkan. Instead, Moshe gave hints, and whoever was able to "make everything that Hashem has commanded" demonstrated thereby that he was a wise-hearted person.

Alternatively, he writes, the phrase "make everything that Hashem has commanded" was a commandment that every volunteer participate in every task so that there would be no jealousy or one-upmanship amongst the volunteers. (Tiferet Yehonatan) © 2025 S. Katz and torah.org

