

THE MISHKAN

A Recreation of Existence



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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Transcending Ego & Recognizing Truth

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1. In Heaven, Moshe was told by G-d, that his people had become corrupt (Idolatry).
2. The Egyptian rabble had instigated the worship of the golden calf.
3. Moshe had allowed them to leave Egypt with the Jewish People.
4. It was within his power to have stopped them from leaving; he did not.
5. There was a claim against Moshe for his endorsement.
6. When Moshe saw the golden calf he smashed the tablets at the foot of the mountain.
7. The breaking of the Tablets was an annulment of the relationship with G-d.
8. It was a retroactive revocation.
9. Moshe chose this location to break the Tablets because that was exactly where they had unequivocally accepted the Torah.
10. Moshe supplicated G-d for forgiveness.
11. G-d offered Moshe the opportunity to become the beginning of a new Jewish People.
12. Moshe: If a nation cannot stand on the merit of the 3 Holy Patriarchs, it cannot stand on the merit of one.
13. Moshe's humility: Knowing G-d wanted His glory to be through the descendants of the Patriarchs.

An Intense Drive Supersedes Barriers

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1. Enormous wealth, given by the Jewish people, was needed to build the Mishkan.
2. Midrash: The least amount of wealth taken out of Egypt was 10 pack animals laden with gold & silver.
3. The spoils of the sea were greater than the spoils of Egypt.
4. Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh: two classifications of people participated in building the Mishkan.
5. Those inspired by their hearts & those of generous spirit.
6. The "inspired by their hearts" are acclaimed as men of stature; not so- "the generous of spirit."
7. The individual who is inspired gives beyond his means - he is taken by the objective.
8. The one motivated by generosity gives to the point where it does not infringe on him personally.
9. Avraham, our Patriarch, rose early to go to the Akeida and hitched his own donkey.
10. Avraham was 137 years old and had servants; why prepare his own donkey for the trek?
11. Bilaam, prophet of the nations - pompous, self-centered, and arrogant, rose early and hitched his donkey to curse the Jewish people.
12. Midrash: Intense love & rabid hate disrupt protocol.
13. When consumed with love or hate, all that exists, despite who you are, is the objective to be addressed.

Definitive Law As Catapult

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1. Moshe assembles the entire Jewish People to teach the laws of Shabbos.
2. Midrash: G-d says, "Gather large assemblies of Jews - so that future generations will learn from you to assemble large assemblies of Jews to teach them what is forbidden and what is permitted - so that I should be extolled among my children."
3. Why? It is possible to say that large numbers of Jews studying Torah is a sanctification of G-d?
4. It appears the Jews are actually praising G-d.
5. There is a positive Commandment to love G-d with all your heart, soul, and assets.
6. How does one achieve this level of love?
7. Gemara: One comes to love G-d through dissemination of Torah to students & engaging in its subject matter.
8. One can only have a true sense of G-d through the study of Torah and its dissemination.
9. When taught the definitive law of the forbidden and permitted, it touches the Jew so causing him to extol G-d.

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayakhel

THE MISHKAN

A Recreation of Existence



Remorse, A Key Component of Repentance

Chazal: The building of the *Mishkan* was an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Just as they had generously and zealously given gold towards the forging of the Golden Calf, so too should they give the gold with zeal and generosity of heart for the building of the *Mishkan*.

Midrash: “Let the gold that was given towards the building of the *Mishkan* atone for the gold that was given for the Golden Calf.” In order to be worthy of atonement, one must repent. A fundamental component of repentance is to have a deep sense of remorse. In addition to remorse, one must make a commitment to the future to never repeat again the sin. It is not sufficient to simply perform a perfunctory act to bring about atonement.

Torah in Ki Sisa: “Moshe turned and descended the mountain, with two Tablets of the Testimony in his hand...”

Sforno: “Moshe had thought that when he will return and the Jewish people will see him with the Tablets in his hand, they will repent immediately. If however, they do not repent, he was prepared to smash the Tablets before their eyes so that they will be moved to repentance.” Thus, the objective of Moshe breaking the Tablets was to cause the Jewish people to appreciate the wrong that they had done and repent.

Torah: “He (Moshe) threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.”

Gemara in Tractate Shabbos: G-d thanked Moshe for smashing the Tablets because it was the equivalent of an annulment of the marriage contract between G-d and the Jewish people. If the relationship would not be annulled it would have been the sin of the Golden Calf would have been the equivalent of committing adultery under the *chupah*. In order to prevent G-d from destroying the Jewish people, Moshe destroyed the Tablets. However, why was important for the *Torah*

to tell us the location where *Moshe* shattered the Tablets (at the foot of the mountain)?

Torah: The Jewish people stood at the foot of the mountain (Sinai) and declared unequivocally “*Naaseh V’nishma* (we will do and we will listen.” The foot of the mountain was the location in which the Jewish people accepted the *Torah* upon themselves without first knowing the extent of their obligation. When G-d heard their declaration a heavenly voice said, “Who revealed this secret to My children?” The Jewish people had reached such a level of negation to His Will that they utilized the same expression of subservience that the angels use in heaven.

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: Each Jew had merited two special crowns for the declaration of “*Naaseh*” and “*Nishma*” which were forfeited and relinquished after the sin of the Golden Calf. *Moshe* shattered the Tablets at the foot of the mountain, which was the location where the Jewish people had reached the pinnacle of their spiritual ascent, in order to bring about their correction through penitence. In order for one to repent sufficiently one must feel totally devastated as a result of his sin. If one were to have a sense of worthiness at the time of repentance, albeit miniscule, it will interfere with the depth of remorse.

When *Moshe* descended from the mountain he had anticipated that the Jewish people would repent when they saw the Tablets in his hands. However, since they did not he needed to shatter them before their eyes. In order to illicit from them the greatest level of remorse he smashed them at the foot of the mountain which was the location of their declaration of “*Naaseh V’nishma*.” He chose that particular place to shatter them because he wanted to communicate to them that their past level of achievement had been annulled. They had no degree of worthiness from their past behavior whatsoever. This provided for them a context to be able to the most profound level of repentance could they be atoned.

Moshe’s Position as G-d’s Spokesman is in Question

Chazal: When the Jewish people declared, “*Naaseh V’nishma* (we will do and we will listen” each Jew merited two spiritual crowns (one for each word of their declaration). However, after *Moshe* returned and broke the first set of Tablets because of the sin of the Golden

Calf, they had to relinquish their spiritual adornments. They thus reverted back to their lesser spiritual state.

Torah: The Jewish people mourned the loss of their special spiritual status. After *Moshe*’s final ascent to heaven he returned with the second set of Tablets on the tenth day of the month of *Tishrei*, which is the day of atonement of the Jewish people, *Yom Kippur*. The second set of Tablets were an indication that G-d had forgiven the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf and they were reinstated once again to be His people. Thus, that day was established until the end of time as the day of atonement. *Moshe* then instructed the Jewish people in the Name of G-d to build the *Mishkan* for G-d to be able to dwell in their midst.

Midrash: “When G-d communicated the building of the *Mishkan* to *Moshe* he showed him how every vessel was to be developed...*Moshe* believed that since he was being instructed that he would be the one to oversee its building. As it states, ‘You (*Moshe*) shall make the curtains...’ ‘You shall make the altar...’ After everything was set in place in a specific order *Moshe* asked G-d, ‘Who will oversee all of this?’ G-d responded, ‘See, I have proclaimed by name, *Bezalel*...’

“*Moshe* upon his return communicated all that was told to him to the Jewish people... They asked him, ‘Who will oversee all of this?’ *Moshe* responded, ‘*Bezalel* will be the one.’ The Jewish people began murmuring, saying, ‘G-d did not instruct *Moshe* to appoint *Bezalel* to oversee the building of the *Mishkan*, but rather it was *Moshe* himself who decided to appoint him because he is a relative. *Moshe* is the king, his brother *Aaron* is the High Priest, etc. *Moshe* wants to dominate all of the building of the *Mishkan*. He is seeking for himself all of the glory by appointing only members of his family.’

“*Moshe* responded to them, ‘There is nothing that I do that is my own initiative, but rather G-d said, ‘See I have called in the name of *Bezalel*...’ This is the meaning of the verse in Proverbs ‘He will find favor and good understanding in the eyes of G-d and man.’ ‘In the eyes of G-d’ is referring to *Bezalel*. ‘In the eyes of man’ is referring to the Jewish people.”

The Jewish people clearly understood because of *Bezalel*’s spiritual qualifications that he was truly chosen by G-d to oversee the building of the *Mishkan*. They understood he possessed a Divine endowment that qualified him for this task. Being told by *Moshe* that

he was the one chosen by G-d to oversee the building of the *Mishkan* was not sufficient for the Jewish people, they needed to see and understand for themselves that *Bezalel* was truly the most qualified for the position and the appointment was not due to nepotism.

When the entire Jewish people stood at Sinai they witnessed G-d openly speaking with *Moshe* face to face saying, "Tell them such and such..." It was clear that G-d had chosen *Moshe* to be His spokesman to transmit His Word. In addition, the *Torah* states, "G-d said to *Moshe*, 'They will believe in you forever...' After the Jewish people engaged in the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d wanted to destroy them. Had it not been for *Moshe's* intense supplications on their behalf, they would have been destroyed. When *Moshe* returned with the second set of Tablets, they understood that it was only because of *Moshe's* intervention that they were spared. If this is so how could they question *Moshe's* integrity regarding *Bezalel's* appointment?

If the Jewish people questioned *Moshe* regarding *Bezalel*, why did they not put into question the entire *Torah* as being the word of *Moshe* and not the word of G-d? It was only because the Jewish people questioned the area in which they felt that they were being infringed upon. They had believed that there were others who were qualified for the position and they did not understand why *Moshe* chose a member from his family and not any of the other candidates. It seemed to be a case of nepotism.

It would seem that the position of the Jewish people regarding the appointment of *Bezalel*, *Moshe's* nephew (the great-grandson of *Miriam* his sister) was identical to the position of *Korach* when he had attempted to usurp the authority of *Moshe*. He had claimed that the appointment of *Aaron* as the high priest was a case of nepotism. He claimed that since the entire Jewish people stood at Sinai, they all had the status of being holy. If this is so why did *Moshe* chose his own brother? It was only because it was the word of *Moshe* and not the Word of G-d.

Moshe was only able to dispel the position of the Jewish people regarding *Bezalel* because he demonstrated that he was truly qualified. Regardless, *Moshe's* credibility as G-d's spokesman was breeched and tarnished by the incident of *Bezalel*. *Korach's* attempt to usurp *Moshe's* authority was not a new concept but rather it reawakened the feelings of the Jewish people

that they had during the appointment of *Bezalel*. The proper position of the Jewish people after Sinai should have been that they were completely negated to *Moshe*, G-d's spokesman, regardless if what he says conforms with their understanding or not.

If one questions the position of *Torah* sages and is only satisfied with their perspective and position after comprehending and agreeing with their view, it is considered a serious flaw. It is clear that this individual does not a sufficient level of subordination to the *Torah* sage. He does not regard him as one with authority but rather he merely agrees with his position. At Sinai, the Jewish people embraced G-d's Word unequivocally with the declaration of "*Naaseh V'nishma* – we will do and we will listen." However, after it was transmitted through *Moshe* they did not fully accept the fact that whatever *Moshe* was communicating to them was necessarily what G-d truly wanted. We see this regarding the appointment of *Bezalel*.

To Be Worthy Of G-d's Endowment

Torah: Regarding the building of the *Mishkan*, "G-d said to *Moshe*, 'I will fill him with the Spirit of G-d with wisdom...'"

Midrash: "G-d filled *Bezalel* with wisdom because he already possessed wisdom. This is to teach us that G-d gives wisdom only to those who already possess wisdom. A matronly woman asked *Reb Yosi Bar Chalafta*, 'What is the meaning of the verse from *Daniel*, G-d gives wisdom to those who are wise? It should have stated G-d gives wisdom to those who are fools. Why would G-d need to give wisdom to someone who already possesses it?'

"*Reb Yosi Bar Chalafta* asked her, 'If two individuals approached you for a loan – one of them being wealthy and the other needy, to whom would you lend the money?' The matronly woman answered, 'To the wealthy one.' *Reb Yosi Ben Chalafta* asked, 'Why?' She replied, 'If the wealthy man were to somehow lose the money that I lent him, he would be able to repay me because of his wealthy. However, if the needy man were to lose my money, he would have no means to repay the loan.'

"*Reb Yosi Bar Chalafta* said, 'Your ears should hear what your mouth is saying. If G-d endowed the fools with wisdom they would sit in unclean locations and

bathhouses. They would desecrate the wisdom that G-d had given them. However, if G-d endows the wise person with wisdom, he will sit in the study hall and in the synagogue and engage in *Torah* dialogue. He would not only preserve the pristine quality of the wisdom that G-d gave him, he would actually develop and advance it by interfacing with the elders...”

Midrash: “If one were to go to a storekeeper to purchase wine, honey, olive oil, or fish brine, if the storekeeper was wise he would first smell the vessel before filling it. If he would smell the fragrance of wine in the vessel, he would fill it with wine. If he would smell the scent of honey, he would fill it with honey...Similarly, if G-d sees that one possesses wisdom, He will fill him with more wisdom. (Because if a vessel contains something other than what is being put into it, it will cause what is being put into it to become putrid).”

Gemara in Tractate *Yomah*: “The storage location for one’s *Torah* is one’s fear of heaven.” As it is stated in the verse, “The fear of G-d is its storage location.” If one does not have sufficient fear of G-d, then he will not merit the Divine Assistance that is necessary to retain it.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin: “If one is not born with wisdom and G-d only gives wisdom to those who already possess it, how does one initially acquire wisdom?”

King David in *Psalms*: “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of heaven...” If one has the fear of heaven, he will be able to appreciate and esteem the wisdom of the *Torah* that he comes upon, understanding that it is an endowment from G-d. He will appreciate the infinite value of what he possesses because it is G-d’s wisdom.

If however, one does not have the fear of heaven, then his *Torah* study is no different from any other intellectual pursuit because he believes that what he understands is as a result of the greatness of his own abilities. Since this individual does not sufficiently understand the significance and essence of the *Torah*, he will disgrace it. This is similar to pouring quality wine into a vessel that had contained fish oil. Therefore, G-d does not allow this individual to acquire *Torah* or retain it.

Mishna in *Ethics of our Fathers* states, “Who is the wise man? The one who can learn from every person.”

Rabbeinu Yonah: If there is an individual who possesses a great amount of knowledge, but he does not feel that he can learn from others, he is considered to be a fool. However, if an individual knows nothing but feels he can

learn from everyone, then he is considered to be wise. It is because the second individual ultimately has the potential to attain an unlimited amount of knowledge and wisdom. Thus, the simple person will be able to come upon many vistas of knowledge and his potential of growth is unlimited because he has an appreciation for wisdom. It is the one who possesses the fear of heaven that has the unlimited capacity to merit G-d’s Wisdom because he is its proper repository.

Clarity is Synonymous with Wisdom

Torah: “*Moshe* said to the Children of Israel, ‘See Hashem has proclaimed by name, *Bezalel* son of *Uri*, son of *Chur*, of the tribe of *Yehudah*. He filled him with G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft...” Why did *Bezalel* merit such a profound level of wisdom?

Midrash: “It states in the *Torah* regarding the Jewish midwives in Egypt, ‘But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them...’ Pharaoh had commanded the Jewish midwives, *Yocheved* and *Miriam*, to kill the newborn Jewish male children during the birthing process. They defied his order because ‘They feared G-d.’ As a reward *Yocheved* and *Miriam* merited that ‘Hashem made for them houses.’ What were these houses?

“*Yocheved* received the houses of Priesthood and Kingship. This reward was realized through *Aaron*, who was the High Priest and *Moshe*, who was the king of the Jewish people. And what did *Miriam* receive? *Miriam*’s reward was wisdom. As it states in *Eyov*, ‘The fear of heaven is wisdom.’ Thus, *Bezalel*, a descendent of *Miriam*, was endowed with the most advanced level of wisdom because *Miriam* feared G-d, as it states, “He filled him with G-dly spirit, with wisdom...”

Reb Chaim of Volozhin *z’tl* in *Nefesh HaChaim*: The word “*yiras*” in the expression “*yiras shemayim* (fear of heaven)” is derived from the word “*ro’eh* (to see).” When one “understands” something, it is not tangible but rather it is abstract; however, when one “sees” something it is a tangible reality. The one who fears G-d is the one who internalizes G-d’s Presence in his life and therefore he “sees” G-d as a reality.

Mishna in *Ethics of our Fathers*: “Who is the wise man? It is the one who sees what is born from his actions.”

The *Mishna* does not state that the wise man is one who “understands” the consequences of his actions, but rather, one who is truly wise internalizes the result of his behavior as a reality that can be seen. One who has a fear of heaven internalizes and sees that G-d is the Master of all and he is thus bound by His Will.

The reward that *Miriam* had received, which was wisdom, was within the context of “measure for measure.” *Miriam* disobeyed Pharaoh’s order to kill the Jewish male children because she “feared G-d.” Her understanding of G-d’s Presence in her life was so profound that the concept of Pharaoh as the monarch was completely negated. She thus disobeyed. She was rewarded with wisdom, which is the basis for understanding and having clarity. Her grandson *Bezalel* was thus endowed with a unique level of wisdom and understanding to be able to oversee the building of the *Mishkan*. This is the meaning of the verse in *Eyov*, “The fear of heaven is wisdom.”

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: G-d sees but cannot be seen. When one has fear (reverence) of G-d, despite the fact that he cannot see Him, because the individual sees what cannot be seen, G-d rewards him with wisdom, which is the ability to “see” spiritual matters as a reality. One would think that *Chazal* would have cited the verse from *Psalms*, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d.” Why did the *Midrash* choose to cite the verse from *Eyov*, “The fear of G-d is wisdom?”

Rabbeinu Bachya: There are two possible interpretations for the verse in *Psalms*. One could understand the verse, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d” to mean that the prerequisite of wisdom is fear of G-d. Thus, in this instance, the consequence of the fear of G-d is not wisdom in itself, but rather, the one who has fear of G-d is a vessel that has the capacity to contain wisdom. *Rabbeinu Bachya*’s second interpretation of the verse is that the first stage of wisdom is the fear of G-d. However, the *Midrash* chooses to cite the verse in *Eyov* to communicate that fear of G-d is not a prerequisite but rather wisdom itself.

Taking Sufficient Initiative

Torah: “All of the work of the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), the Tent of the Meeting, was completed...They brought the Tabernacle to *Moshe*, the Tent and all its utensils...” Rashi cites the *Midrash*, “Why did the Jewish people bring the Tabernacle to *Moshe* to erect? It was because

of the weight of the beams that they were not able to erect it. *Moshe* had not participated at all in the building (development) of the *Mishkan*. G-d, therefore, reserved the erecting of the *Mishkan* for him so that he should complete its building.

It was humanly impossible to erect the *Mishkan* because of the weight of the beams. Even *Moshe* initially did not understand how he would be able to lift the beams. He asked G-d, ‘How is it possible for me to lift the beams? It is beyond my capacity.’ G-d responded, ‘You take the initiative to lift the beams so that it will appear that you are erecting the *Mishkan* and then they will erect themselves (through a miracle). This is the reason the verse states, ‘the Tabernacle was completed...’ indicating that it was completed on its own.”

Chazal: Regarding the tablets, it was humanly impossible to lift and transport the tablets because of their enormous weight. Nevertheless, *Moshe* was able to do so. In fact, the tablets transported him. If this is so, then why was *Moshe* confounded when he was told to complete the *Mishkan*? What was the basis for his concern if he had already understood that what relates to spirituality is not bound by the natural order?

The *Mishkan* was intended to be the location for the Divine Presence to dwell in the midst of the Jewish people. Physical existence itself was initially intended to be the location of the Divine Presence. It was only because of the sin of *Adam* that it became tainted and thus not qualified to be the location for G-d. Every aspect of the *Mishkan* alludes to and reflects the creation of existence. It was a microcosm of existence.

Moshe understood that although the Jewish people were able to build the individual aspects and components of the *Mishkan*, its erection and completion needed to be done by G-d Himself. Just as He had created the world in six days and entered into it on the seventh (*Shabbos*), so too would He need to complete the *Mishkan* to accommodate His Presence. If the beams were humanly impossible to lift, it was an indication that G-d was the One to erect them. G-d said to *Moshe*, “You take the initiative and the beams will raise themselves.”

The world was initially created through the Attribute of Kindness. As the verse states in *Psalms*, “*Olam chesed Yibaneh* – Through kindness the world was created.” In order for man be a beneficiary of that

kindness and opportunity, he needs to take initiative, as prescribed by G-d. In order for G-d to enter into the midst of the Jewish people, *Moshe* needed to take the initiative in order to be worthy of Divine Assistance to bring about the completion of the *Mishkan*, although it was beyond human capacity.

We find, regarding the *Menorah*, which represents the Oral Law, which is G-d's elucidation of His Written Law, was cast by G-d Himself. Initially *Moshe* was not able to make the *Menorah*, which encompassed the spirituality of G-d's Infinite Wisdom. G-d told him to take the gold and put it into the kiln and the *Menorah* emerged fully formed. *Moshe* needed to take the initiative in order to activate Divine Assistance. It is only through the Jew's initiative and toiling that he is able to come upon the truth of *Torah*.

Gemara in Tractate *Megillah*: If one says that he had toiled in his pursuit of *Torah* and had come upon it (its truth) he should be believed. However, if one claims that he did not toil and did come upon it, he should not be believed. Because he did not toil, he does not merit Divine Assistance.

Gemara in Tractate *Kiddushin*: One is not able to repent unless G-d assists him. However, if one takes the initiative to advance his spirituality, he will merit G-d's Assistance. As the *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos* states, "One who comes to purify himself will be assisted..."



Yad Avraham Institute