



Parasha VaYakhel: Vanity Mirrors and Humility.

Beit Emet Congregation ~ Vancouver, WA

Rabbi Robert N. Gordon

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Text: Parasha VaYakhel Torah: Sh'mot 35:1-38:20; Haftarah: M'lakim Bet 12:1-17; Sh'mu'el Alef 20:18 & 42; B'rit Chadasha: Mattityahu 17:1-5.

Theme: VaYakhel, "And you shall gather"

I. Introduction:

This week's parasha describes the fashioning and crafting of the **B'eit HaMishkan (House of the Tabernacle)** by the "**skilled people whose hearts were endowed with wisdom by YHVH**" (Sh'mot 36:2). The parasha describes many of the vessels of the **Kadosh (Set-apart) Place**. For a second time (the Ark, Table, Menorah are described here in **Sh'mot chapter 37**, a repeat of **Sh'mot chapter 25**). Why is this detail necessary? Why does the Torah need to go into this lengthy description a second time?

R. Nativ suggests the following historical answer: The Torah, despite its divine nature, was not born in a vacuum. Its messages are eternal, there are lessons for all time, but we must all agree that the Torah was given over, at a particular point in history to a particular people who lived in an **olam (world)** with a strong, firmly established way in religious expression. At the time of the birth of Scriptural Faith, all cultures had temples and all religions were practiced through sacrifices of one type or another. This is the religious reality, the cultural background that Scriptural Faith had to contend with.

Scriptural Faith arrived and introduced a revolution in many areas: the dignity of man, human freedom, and ethical monotheism. Many new ideas were introduced. For the Yisra'elim, there were **Mitzvot (Commands)** and Regulations to follow, 613 **Mitzvot** which would shape the new way of life that Elohim was introducing into the **olam (world)**. Certain ideas were unique to the new Faith. Shabbat for example. These could be mentioned in a sentence. There was no danger that any of the contemporary culture would pollute these ideas because only the Yisra'elim were practicing them. But if Elohim told them to build a B'eit HaMikdash, to bring **Korbanot (Sacrifices)**, they would have simply followed the contemporary pagan way!

So, for the notion of the **Korban (Sacrifice)**, of the B'eit HaMishkan, the **Kadosh (Set-apart) Place**, Elohim had to spell it all out. To prevent possible osmosis, or contamination, from other cultures and the infiltration of alien ideas into the Yisra'eli mindset that YHVH was establishing, the Torah had to define these spiritual tools in the greatest detail. A Yisra'eli B'eit HaMishkan was to be exactly this way. Nothing was to be left to interpretation.

But as for Shabbat, there was no danger from the outside for it was uniquely Yisra'eli. However, YHVH, through Moshe, defined what would become its shape and form. Hence, Shabbat receives a rather brief description. The **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**, on

the other hand, is described in deliberate detail to ensure that its symbolism conforms to the ideals of the YHVH's Divine Plan.

II. Kapparah (Atonement)

This explanation only tells us something about the detailed descriptions here. Their intricacy and detail is indeed remarkable. But what of the repetition of the entire construction? R. Israel asks: Could the Torah not have stated; "And the people acted as YHVH had Commanded" or something of that sort?

Sh'mot introduces us to another concept which might explain the repetition of the construction of the vessels of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)** that we read in our parasha. R. Israel writes: Note a clearly symmetrical structure: **Mishkan (Tabernacle)-Shabbat-Calf-Shabbat-Mishkan (Tabernacle)**. This is termed a chiasmic structure in the academic world. This concentric structure, commonly found in the Torah, tells us much about the inter-relationship of the themes within it.

In this case, it would seem that a connection is being deliberately drawn between the sin of the **golden calf (eigel haZahav)** and the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**. What might that connection be?

On Yom Kippur the Yisra'elim were forgiven for the sin of the **golden calf (eigel haZahav)**. That very day we were Commanded, "**Make Me a Kadosh (Set-apart) Place and I will dwell amongst them**" (**Sh'mot 25:8**) in order to inform the **olam (world)** that we had received **Kapparah (Atonement)** for the sin of the calf. It could be said, that is why, the **Mishkan or Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting)** is called "**the Tent of Testimony**" (**Sh'mot 38:21**), for it testifies to all the **olam (world)** that Elohim resides in our **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**.

Elohim said, "**Let the gold of the Kadosh (Set-apart) Place come and Atonement for the gold that formed the calf.**" There it states "**The people removed their gold rings etc.**" (**Sh'mot 32:3**), and the gold was their **Kapparah (Atonement)** as it states, "**This is the donation that you shall receive from them, Gold**" (**Sh'mot 25:3**) (Midrash Tanchuma - T'ruma).

The construction of the B'eit HaMishkan was open for all to participate in. B'nei Yisra'el are one unit. We are many individuals who comprise that unit. R. Friedman writes: The Command of the B'eit HaMishkan's construction (which will bring YHVH's presence in the **olam hazeh (this world)**) is given when we realize that YHVH (Who is the epitome of one-and no other besides Him) will not live amongst His Nation if they are not unified. Now we see that the B'eit HaMishkan is given to a nation who is bound together as one solid rope, attached to YHVH. Nu, my friends Efrayim and Y'hudah together. One Yisra'el it must be.

Even though we pushed YHVH out of our lives (during that short time we foolishly thought that the **golden calf (eigel haZahav)** was the way to serve YHVH), YHVH accepted our **t'shuvah (repentant by turning around)** and returned to us. Through the construction of the B'eit HaMishkan, YHVH made a place in the lower **olam** (this world we live in) to live in. The B'eit HaMishkan was the way we felt YHVH's **Shekhinah (Kavodim (Esteemed) Presence)** with us.

Again, the Shekhinah Cloud reappeared in the days of Mashiach. Just as Moshe took his talmid, Y'hoshua, with him as he ascended Sinai, so Yahshua led his closest talmidim, Kefa, Ya'akov and Yochanan, up to "**a high mountain**" to **daven (pray)**

(**Mattityahu 17:1**). When Moshe came down from Sinai, the skin of his face shone from the encounter with Elohim's **Kavod (Esteem)**, and the people were afraid to come near him (**Sh'mot 34:29**) On this other mountain, Yahshua's appearance was transformed "**and His face shone like the sun**" (**Mattityahu 17:2**). Then Moshe, with Eliyahu the **Navi (Prophet)**, appeared and spoke with Him. Yahshua's talmid Kefa suggested that they build, not just a **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**, but three **Mishkanot (Tabernacles)** to mark the event.

Yochanan Mark writes that Kefa made this suggestion "**because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid**" (**Yochanan Mark 9:6**). R. Resnik writes: Perhaps the impulsive talmid had in mind the portable **Mishkan (Tabernacle)** in the Wilderness, for this event was beginning to resemble the encounter at Sinai.

As Kefa's words trailed off "**a bright Cloud**," the luminous Shekhinah Cloud of **Kavod (Esteem)** overshadowed them and a voice came out of the Cloud, another reminder of Sinai. This time, however, the words were different, He added only this: "**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!**" (**Mattityahu 17:5**). The talmidim fell on their faces in fear in the presence of the Shekhinah Cloud that displays Elohim's **Kavod (Esteem)**, but keeps man at a distance. Then Yahshua drew near and touched them, and when they looked up He alone was there.

When we set-apart ourselves, we become a miniature B'eit HaMishkan for YHVH to live in. Are our **nefashot (souls)** any less **Kadosh (Set-apart)** than the wood, copper, silver and gold used for the B'eit HaMishkan? YHVH lives in every Yisra'eli **nefesh (soul)** that is attached to Him.

Story: When Rav Menachem Mendel from Kotzk (the Kotzker Rebbe) was a child, he was asked by his father's friend; "Menachem Mendel, where does Elohim live?" The young child snapped back with the response; "Wherever you let Him!"

YHVH lives within the **nefesh (soul)** of everyone who lets Him in. We should treat ourselves with respect since we know that our **nefashot (souls)** are part of YHVH's dwelling. We should dress respectfully, speak respectfully, act respectfully, and think of thoughts that will bring YHVH closer into our lives. Our lives are meaningful since we have an infinite amount of opportunities to bring **Kadoshah (Set-apartness)** into our lives. We grieve over the destruction of the B'eit HaMikdash, yet we can be that structure who carries within, the Presence of YHVH.

As we learned, YHVH wanted a place in the **olam hazeh (this present world)** to house His Presence. The universe would have been that place, had Adam and Chava not eaten from the **Eitz HaDa'at (tree of knowledge)**. After they did that **cheit (transgression)**, YHVH's Presence was confined and reserved for the **olam haba (the next world or the world to come)**. The sages have said that the **Kadosh (Set-apart)** Shabbat is an opportunity to enter that **olam haba (the world to come)**, for a delightful 24 hour period. Nu, the B'eit HaMishkan is creating that home of YHVH in a specific space, as Shabbat is creating that home of YHVH in a specific time.

Moshe Rabbeinu offered the opportunity to contribute to the B'eit HaMishkan's construction, to everyone. This communal effort rectified the communal effort made to create the **golden calf (eigel haZahavei)**.

The **Mishkan (Tabernacle)** is a sign that Elohim has forgiven the Yisra'elim. How so? One might imagine that the plan to erect a **Kadosh (Set-apart) Place**, the expression of the Covenantal bond between Elohim and Yisra'el, would have been postponed

indefinitely in the wake of the calf affair. After all, the **golden calf (eigel haZahav)** was a classic act of betrayal. How could the Nation put up a structure denoting Elohim's Presence amongst them so soon after we had rejected Him? It is indeed remarkable that the show did go on. What a forgiving Elohim we have. Moshe's intercession on the Yisra'elim behalf ensured B'nei Yisra'el were granted a reprieve. One might imagine that certain scars still lay beneath the surface, that the relationship would be forever tainted in some way. The Torah repeats it all, word for word, to emphasize that the pre-sin and the post-sin relationship are identical. The repair is absolute, the healing complete.

Hence, the double description tells an important tale of forgiveness and return to the Covenantal relationship with Elohim.

III. The Kiyor (Laver-Washbasin)

Let us move from the general to the specific. Let us discuss one particular vessel of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**. We will talk about the **Kiyor (washing laver)**.

A fundamental principle of these chapters is that every element of the **Kadosh (Set-apart) Place**, every item, each choice of pattern, material, and shape, embodies a particular message or concept. R. Hirsch writes of following an entire science of **Mishkan (Tabernacle)** symbolism, examining the materials, the method of design, the aesthetics and the form of each and every part of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**. (The philosophy that underlies this theory states that the basic ideas of Scriptural Faith are the primary factor that gave shape to the **Kadosh (Set-apart)** vessels of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**). Indeed, it was the craftsman Betzal'el and his group of workers (**Sh'mot 35:30-36:3**) each endowed with **chokhmat-lev (wisdom of the heart)** who were able to take the conceptual blueprint and put it into concrete form.

R. Israel writes: As we study the parasha of the B'eit HaMishkan, it is useful to stop and focus on certain details which can frequently give an interesting, novel or inspiring angle on points of Yisra'eli thought. If the B'eit HaMishkan is the physical translation of absolute Yisra'eli ideas, then the study of the furniture of **Mishkan (Tabernacle)** will reap rich dividends in understanding classic Torah concepts.

One of the interesting items contained in the B'eit HaMishkan was the **Kiyor (the laver or washbasin)**. The **Kohanim (Priests)** were required to wash their hands and feet before they performed the **Avoda or Kadosh (Set-apart) Service**, so this was a rather essential element of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**.

The Command to create the **Kiyor** is described in last week's parasha: **Make a Kiyor of copper and a copper stand for it, for washing; and place it between the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) and the altar. Put water in it, and let Aharon and his sons wash their hands and feet from it. When they enter the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) they shall wash with water, that they may not die... (Sh'mot 30:17-20).**

IV. Vanity Mirrors

The actual construction of the **Kiyor** is described in our parasha where we are told in a single sentence: **He made the Kiyor of copper and its copper stand from the mirrors of the women who gathered at the entrance to the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) (Sh'mot 38:8).**

Why do we need to be informed as to the origin of the raw materials for the **Kiyor**? We are never told whose gold created the Menorah, or whose wool made the

curtains of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**. Why are we emphatically informed that this copper originated with this group of women? Are we interested if someone donates her copper mirror or a pair of earrings or anything else for that matter? And another question can be asked. Who is this group of women who congregate at the entrance to the **Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting)**? They are referred to as if they were a definable group but we don't know a thing about them!

V. Women of Faith

Rashi, R. Shlomo ben Yitzchak, concerning **Sh'mot 38:8**, offers interesting answers for both these questions. He tells us why the materials used for the **Kiyor** are singled out and this is linked with the identity of these women. When the women offered their mirrors as gifts for the **B'ait HaMishkan** it was an act of great significance.

The women of Yisra'el had mirrors which they used when they beautified themselves with cosmetics to make themselves attractive and endear them to their husbands. Rashi suggests that it was due to these mirrors that these women brought **myriads (tzeva'ot)** into the **olam (world)** when they were in Mitzrayim.

Rashi uses an interesting pun here. The mirrors are described as **mar'ot ha-tzov'ot**. **Mar'ot are mirrors**, but the word **tzov'ot** is **hosts** or **armies**. Rashi connects it with the word **tzeva'ot (myriads)**. These were the mirrors which created myriads of Yisra'elim, an entire generation.

When their husbands were engaged in backbreaking labor they would go to see their husbands bringing along food and drink. They would eat together and then they would hold up the mirrors together and would see themselves in the mirror. She would tease him saying, I am better-looking than you and in this way they would attract their husbands, and had children, and these are the **mar'otha-tzov'ot (mirrors of hosts or armies)**.

To summarize R. Israel states: This comment by Rashi paints for us the desperate situation that the Yisra'elim experienced in Mitzrayim. There was no hope in the future. Husbands lived in labor camps away from their wives. Bringing children into the **olam (world)** was an absurdity. Why bring another slave into the **olam (world)**? And if it happens to be a boy, he will be flung into the river.

The situation as described here leads us to a famous midrash (Chizkunion Sh'mot 2:1) about Yokheved and Amram, Moshe's parents, which states that they parted rather than bring further children into the **olam (world)**. It was an act of faith which led them to get back together and they were rewarded with Moshe as their son. Here too, the men have despaired of the future of their people. The women still have faith in Elohim. They have hope. The women visit their husbands in the midst of their despair, their depression and filth, and they use the mirrors as part of a process. In this way, the Yisra'eli people were given new life, and myriads were brought into the **olam (world)**.

The Ramban, R. Moshe Ben Nachman, disagrees with Rashi's reading. He feels that it doesn't fit with the second phrase of the **pasuk asher tzav'u petach Ohel Moed (who gathered at the entrance to the Ohel Moed) (Tent of Meeting)**. It was true that women habitually looked in the mirror, made of copper or glass, every morning to put their head-dress into shape. However, the Ramban comes up with a new theory based on a comment by the Ibn Ezra, R. Avraham Ibn Ezra, in P'rush HaArokh:

Now, amongst the Yisra'elim were certain women, dedicated to the service of Elohim, who distanced themselves from worldly desire. They donated their mirrors to the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)** as they had no further use for beautification. These women would come each day to the entrance of the **Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting)** to **daven (pray)** and to hear the details of the **Mitzvot (Commands)**.

According to this explanation of the Ibn Ezra, there was a group of women who gave away their mirrors! These were women who decided to dedicate every last fiber of their being to Elohim. To this end, it would appear that they paid no attention to their physical appearance and would not indulge in worrying about the way they looked. Instead, they occupied themselves solely with Torah and prayer. Remember Hanna, who served in the **B'eit HaMikdash (House of the Temple)** and rejoiced over Yahshua. **Luke 2:36, 37: 36 And there was Hannah, a prophetess, a daughter of Penu'el, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, and had lived with a husband seven years from her maidenhood, 37 and she was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not leave the Kadosh (Set-apart) Place, but served Elohim with fastings and prayers night and day.**

These ascetic women disposed of their mirrors as an expression of their non-worldly aspirations. They were used, quite appropriately, for the **Kiyor**, Basin of Purity, which stood, just like these women, at the entrance to the **Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting)**.

VI. Human Desire and Elohim

Clearly, these two readings of a single verse reveal diametrically opposed approaches to the same issue, either or both of which might be true. Women are properly elevated in either case. In fact, as to the importance of women as part of Kol Yisra'el, and their help in forming the **Mishkan**, we read in **Sh'mot 35: 25, 26: 25 And all the wise-hearted women spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, the blue and the purple, the scarlet material, and the fine linen. 26 And all the women whose hearts lifted them up in wisdom spun the goats' hair.**

Rashi expresses a view which suggests that beauty enhancement, when used to cultivate love between husband and wife, when utilized to further the Yisra'eli people, is appropriate. In fact, it is more than appropriate; it is **Kadosh (Set-apart)!** These mirrors were used for a noble purpose, for the self same purpose that caused Elohim to create human passion in the first place. These mirrors find their place in the **Kadosh (Set-apart)** space of the **Mishkan (Tabernacle)**.

The Ibn Ezra proposes that one can find true **Kadoshah (Set-apartness)** when one transcends, or rises above, the human. The natural is an important aspect of human living but there are spiritual realms which rise above those levels. There is a need for a separation between the physical and the spiritual. The two are located in different worlds. For the ordinary man, human desire can find its place integrated within a life of **Kadoshah (Set-apartness)**. But there are pious saintly levels which demand that one transcend the passions of the flesh.

Sounds almost Greek, or monastic, doesn't it? However, it is true that, Moshe went to the top of Mount Sinai and did not eat or drink for forty days. According to the midrash (Rashi **B'midbar 12:1**), Moshe separated from his wife. There is a certain view which sees the ultimate **Kadoshah (Set-apartness)** as beyond the realm of humanity.

Can the human enter the **Kadosh of Kadoshim (Set-apart of Set-aparts)**? Can human desire be **Kadosh (Set-apart)** and elevated, or is there a level of **Kadoshah (Set-apartness)** that can be reached only by negating one's humanity? This question is difficult. Maybe there are different answers for different people.

Consider some of Rav Sha'ul's teaching about singleness and marriage, both of which are considered noble endeavors. Certainly, different groups throughout Yisra'eli history have proposed a whole range of answers. Such a group as the Essenes comes to mind.

VII. Conclusion and Application:

Sh'mot Chapter 38:24 tells us that over twenty nine talents of gold were used in the B'eit HaMishkan. A talent is approximately ninety-eight pounds. There were 2,842 pounds of gold in the B'eit HaMishkan. This means that, of the six hundred thousand adult males, each contributed about four and two thirds pounds to the making of the B'eit HaMishkan. This does not include silver, bronze, precious stones and other materials used in the B'eit HaMishkan. Figuring the price of gold at nine-hundred-seventy-four dollars per ounce, the total value of the gold used would be over forty-four million dollars. There is no way to calculate the value of the precious stones and other material used but it has been estimated that there was another thirty or forty million in materials used in constructing the B'eit HaMishkan. In today's market, one would have to add the cost of labor. How could we guess the number of man hours spent in making the B'eit HaMishkan?

How much effort do we go through before entering the **Kadosh (Set-apart) Place** with Elohim? If we want the **Kavod (Esteem)** of Elohim to fill our **Mishkanot (Tabernacles)**, we should take pains to complete spiritually what Moshe did physically. Cleanse, anoint, and prepare the **Kadosh (Set-apart) Place**. Hang the curtains according to YHVH's **Torah (Instruction)**. Offer **Korbanot (Sacrifices)** and **sweet smelling incense (prayers)** unto YHVH and then he will come into our B'eit HaMishkan with **Kavod (Esteem)** and with Power. B'ruch HaShem YHVH!