

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayakhel
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vayakhel – The three spheres of holiness

In this week's Parasha of Vayakhel we learn about Bnei Yisrael building the Mishkan and making the various holy utensils that were used in the Mishkan. In next week's Parasha of Pekudai (which is often read together with our Parasha) we will learn about the special clothes that the Kohanim wore while serving in the Mishkan.

Prior to this discussion about the Mishkan and the clothes of the Kohanim, the Torah reminds us to keep Shabbat.¹ Shabbat is one of the most important mitzvot that we have, and it comes up everywhere. But why is it specifically relevant to the building of the Mishkan? In his commentary, Rashi explains the juxtaposition – Bnei Yisrael is being told that despite the importance of building the Mishkan, it does not supersede the prohibition against performing work on Shabbat. In addition, on a practical level, we learn the forbidden categories of labour from this juxtaposition between Shabbat and the Mishkan. The 39 categories of labour involved in the building of the Mishkan are precisely the categories of labour which are forbidden to be performed on Shabbat.

However, there is also a deeper relationship between the concept of the Mishkan and Shabbat. The Mishkan created holiness in space. Shabbat creates holiness in time. And the Kohanim, who would work in the Mishkan, represented holiness among people. By mentioning Shabbat, the building of the Mishkan and the clothes of the Kohanim at the same time, the Torah brings these three concepts of holiness together.

The mystics² teach that everything that Hashem created exists on three planes – space, time and soul. Hashem created space and the 'stuff' that exists in space, He created the concept of time, and He created the purpose of creation – the soul of human beings. Shabbat represents holiness in time. The Mishkan represents holiness in space. And the Kohanim who serve in the Bet Hamikdash represent holiness amongst people. Our Parsha teaches us about the interrelationship between these planes. For example, we have a task of bringing holiness to our 'space'. This is represented by Bnei Yisrael's role in building of the Mishkan. However, we can't do this at the expense of holiness in time. When it is time for Shabbat, our work in this sphere must pause.

Hashem's balancing act in the three spheres

Hashem hides Himself behind the world. That is why the Hebrew word for 'world' (olam) has the same root as the Hebrew word for hidden (ne'elam)³. One reason Hashem hides Himself is to give us free will. If Hashem's presence was blatantly obvious, then no-one would sin. Hashem wants us to have free will in order for us to earn our reward and to feel an associated sense of achievement. Hashem wants us to **choose** to do the right thing and thus earn our reward in the World to Come. Thus, Hashem hides Himself, thereby enabling us to have free will.

On the other hand, if Hashem hid Himself too well, such that there would be no chance of finding Him, then we would have the opposite problem. The physical world exerts a powerful influence on us because we experience it strongly with all of our senses. If we had no chance at all of discovering

¹ Parshat Vayakhel, Shmot 35:2.

² See for example, Sefer Yetzirah.

³ Heard from Rabbi Akiva Tatz.

Hashem in this world, then it would be almost impossible for us to connect with Hashem and live a Torah life. We would be drawn too strongly towards the physical at the expense of the spiritual.

Hashem does not expect us to do the impossible. Therefore, Hashem chooses to act in a finely balanced manner – He conceals Himself to a great degree in this world to allow us free will. But He reveals just enough of Himself to enable us to notice His presence in this world and have a chance of discovering Him.⁴ When Hashem reveals himself, we experience revealed holiness. And when He hides Himself, His holiness appears concealed. We see this phenomenon in each of the three planes of creation that we discussed above.

- **Space.** There are certain spaces that are obviously more holy than others, like the Bet Hamikdash, the Kotel, shuls, a Bet Midrash. In contrast, there are other spaces that appear to lack any semblance of holiness.
- **Time.** There are certain days of the Jewish calendar that are more holy, like Yom Kippur, Shabbat, the other Yamim Tovim, times spent in shule davening, time spent learning in a shiur. There are other times that seem to have no holiness at all, such as first thing Monday morning! However, since Hashem Himself created time in this world, every moment of time has a spark of holiness embedded in it, it is just more or less revealed.
- **Soul.** There are certain people that seem to exude holiness, such as the Avot, the Prophets, the great Tzaddikim, the Kohen Gadol, the Gedolei Hador (the great Torah leaders of every generation). These are the people that we should look up to as someone to emulate. However, in reality, every Jew is holy as we are all created in the image of Hashem. Hashem Himself has given each of us a spark of this holiness in our neshamot. It is just that for some people, this holiness may be more hidden (i.e., covered with more layers or 'klipot').

Hashem wants us to be His partner in bringing holiness into the world. By acting in a holy way, we can elevate the mundane parts of the world and thus fill in the spaces that Hashem has left for us. We can literally be partners with Hashem in creation by uncovering the inherent sparks of holiness. We can strive to do this in each of the three spheres of creation.

- **Space.** We can try to bring holiness into spaces that are not usually holy. For example, we could designate a special place at home where we learn Torah (a makom kavua); or we could use our car for listening to recorded shiurim.
- **Time.** We can try to inject some holiness into mundane times. For example, while waiting in a queue, try to revise some Torah or recite Tehillim; before going into a business meeting offer a short prayer to Hashem asking for success; after a successful business meeting offer a short prayer of thanks to Hashem; at dinner share some Torah thoughts or talk about good middot with our family.
- **Soul.** We can't all be the Kohen Gadol or a great Tzaddik. But we all have a spark of holiness within us. We can work on ourselves to reveal that spark of holiness more and more. Also, we can seek out someone that is worth looking up to and try to emulate their character traits. A good way to accomplish this is to choose a small area of our character that needs improvement and try to work on it every day.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that Hashem's holiness in this world resides in three spheres – space, time and soul.
2. Try to be Hashem's partner in bringing holiness into the world and elevating the spaces that Hashem has left for us to fill. Look for opportunities to increase holiness in the three spheres of creation – space (e.g. listen to shiurim in the car), time (e.g. use time waiting in queues to learn Torah) and soul (e.g. choose one aspect of our character and try to work on it each day).

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁴ This idea was presented by the previous Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks in his Covenant and Conversation series.