

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayakhel Pekudai
March 2026 / Adar 5786

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vayakhel Pekudai - Forgiveness

In this week's double Parasha of Vayakhel Pekudai, we read about the building of the Mishkan and its implements and the garments of the Kohen Gadol. Many of the details set out in this week's double Parasha parallel Parashat Terumah and Tetzaveh, which we read a few weeks ago. Parashat Terumah contains Hashem's commandment to build the Mishkan and its implements, including the specific measurements and details. Parashat Vayakhel contains a description of Bnei Yisrael actually building the Mishkan and its implements and many of the measurements and details that were already included in Parashat Terumah are repeated here. The same applies to Parshiyot Tetzaveh and Pekudai.

This week's Parshiyot can be seen as the fourth and fifth Parshiyot in a series of five, as follows:

1. Terumah – Hashem's commandment to build the Mishkan and its implements
2. Tetzaveh – Hashem's commandment to make garments for the Kohen Gadol
3. Ki Tisa – The sin of the golden calf
4. Vayakhel – Bnei Yisrael actually build the Mishkan and its implements
5. Pekudai – Bnei Yisrael actually make the garments for the Kohen Gadol

The great Torah commentator, Rashi, adds relatively little commentary on Vayakhel and Pekudai. He mainly refers back to his commentary on Terumah and Tetzaveh¹.

In general, the Torah is very economical with its use of words. Yet, here the Torah spends 211 verses re-describing the process of building the Mishkan². Why? Surely these pasukim could have simply been replaced with one single verse: "And Bnei Yisrael built the Mishkan and its implements as Hashem commanded"!

Some commentators³ have suggested that the answer lies in the events described in Ki Tisa, the sin of the golden calf. It is difficult to imagine a more heinous sin than idol worship at the foot of Har Sinai, especially so soon after Hashem Himself had commanded Bnei Yisrael not to worship idols. This event is sandwiched between Hashem's original commandment to build the Mishkan and the actual building of the Mishkan. Due to the gravity of the sin, one might presume that Hashem would not forgive the Jewish people completely. Thus, to counter this erroneous presumption, perhaps the Torah repeats all of the details to show us that Hashem's forgiveness was absolute and complete.⁴ Despite Bnei Yisrael's enormous sin, Hashem still allows them to build the Mishkan exactly as He had originally intended before the sin. Perhaps such a message of Hashem's complete forgiveness would

¹ See Rashi on Shmot 35:5.

² This includes the pasukim in Parashat Vayakhel and Parashat Pekudai.

³ The Brisker Rav makes a similar comment.

⁴ There still had to be a consequence to the sin, but Hashem agreed to spread it out over many years. In the future, whenever Bnei Yisrael were to be punished, Hashem would also take into account a little of this sin with the other sins. In this way, Bnei Yisrael would not be destroyed. (see Rashi to Shmot 32:34 and Gemara Sanhedrin 102a).

not have been adequately conveyed if the description of the building of the Mishkan in Vayakhel and Pekudai was simply summarised in a single pasuk.

What can we learn from this? An important principle of Judaism is that we should strive to emulate Hashem and to walk in His ways⁵. If Hashem can completely forgive Bnei Yisrael despite their heinous sin, we can similarly strive to emulate Him and to completely forgive others who have sinned against us, in our own lives.

Yet it can be difficult to achieve this level of complete forgiveness in practice. For instance, if someone harms us in a vindictive, deliberate and pre-meditated manner, even if we say that we forgive them, how can we feel complete forgiveness in our hearts?

Rabbi Akiva Tatz⁶ teaches us some good advice on this issue. He reminds us that Hashem runs the world in a manner of middah k'neged middah (measure for measure). The way that we act is the way that Hashem acts towards us. If we can find it within our hearts to forgive our fellow for a sin that really does not deserve to be forgiven, then we can legitimately ask Hashem to forgive us for our sins that really do not deserve to be forgiven. This idea provides us with a strong incentive to forgive others, even when it is difficult to do so.

On the other hand, if we don't attempt to work on forgiving others, or if we merely succeed in forgiving our fellow superficially, while harbouring resentment in our hearts, then Hashem may not completely forgive us for our sins either.

Though this idea provides added incentive to try harder to forgive, what can we do to help us achieve this state of complete forgiveness of those who hurt us badly? Rabbi Twersky provides us with some very practical and sensible tips in his book "Forgiveness - Don't let resentment keep you captive". For example, he suggests that one repeatedly imagines the person that they wish to forgive standing next to a person that they love very deeply. After a while, the positive feelings that you have towards the person that you love may extend over to the person that you are trying to forgive.

In addition, like with everything else, we can turn to Hashem and ask Him for assistance. We may not want to forgive someone, but at least we can "want to want" it⁷. And then we can ask Hashem to help us reach the next level.

Forgiveness is a process. It involves the heart, which is emotional and works best at a gradual, gentle pace. The month of Elul and Yom Kippur are about half a year away. So if we start working on forgiveness now, hopefully by the time that we arrive at Elul we will be able to turn to Hashem and ask Him to forgive us completely for our own sins, middah k'neged middah.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember how forgiving Hashem was to Bnei Yisrael after the sin of the golden calf. Think about all of the sins that we have done towards Hashem and how much we yearn for Him to forgive us.
2. Think of somebody that we are struggling to forgive.
3. Work hard on completely forgiving the person that has wronged us. Perhaps use some of the tips and guidance in Rabbi Twersky's book to assist. Even if we forgive them for non-altruistic reasons (e.g. so that we can be forgiven by Hashem for our sins), this is still valid forgiveness.
4. Try to do something tangible to demonstrate our forgiveness of the person, for example make contact with them.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁵ Sefer HaChinuch mitzva 611.

⁶ Heard in one of Rabbi Tatz's recorded lectures.

⁷ Rabbi Tatz discusses the idea of "wanting to want" in his recorded lectures.