

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Vayakhel

Activating Holiness

Shabbos, the Mishkan and the Chet Ha'egel

וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עֵדֻת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָם

*Moshe assembled the entire congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them, "These are the things that Hashem has commanded to perform them."*¹

INTRODUCTION: PRESENTING SHABBOS AND THE MISHKAN

Our parsha is devoted to describing the construction of the Mishkan and its component parts. Before presenting this topic, however, Moshe first prefaces with two verses concerning observing the Shabbos. The message of this juxtaposition is that although the people are about to embark on the lofty endeavor of constructing the Mishkan, Shabbos observance takes precedence over this and no work for the Mishkan can be done on Shabbos.²

It is interesting to note a difference in the way the topics of Shabbos and Mishkan are introduced:

- ▷ Although observing the Shabbos is one idea, it is introduced with the plural "אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים – These are the things."
- ▷ By contrast, the building of the Mishkan, which comprises many details that take up the rest of the parsha, is introduced with the singular "זֶה הַדְּבָר – This is the matter."³

What is behind these two differing and counter-intuitive introductions?

Additionally, many commentators note that in last week's parsha, when the idea that building the Mishkan does not override the Shabbos is presented by Hashem to Moshe, the Mishkan is mentioned first and Shabbos second.⁴ This is taken to mean that building the Mishkan must come to a halt on Shabbos. In our parsha, when communicating exactly the same idea, Moshe reverses the order, placing Shabbos first. What is behind this reversal?

1 Shemos 35:1.

2 Rashi to verse 2.

3 Verse 4.

4 Shemos 31:1-13.

KADOSH AND KODESH – TWO TYPES OF HOLINESS

In order to answer these questions, let us preface by referring to a comment of the Meshech Chochmah, who notes that we find two different ways in which the Torah refers to the holiness of the Jewish people:

- ▷ In Parshas Mishpatim, the verse states: “וְאַנְשֵׁי קִדְשׁ תִּהְיוּן לִי – You shall be people of holiness to Me.”⁵
- ▷ In Parshas Re’eh, it states: “כִּי עַם קְדוֹשׁ אַתָּה – For you are a holy people.”⁶

What is the difference in meaning between “Kodesh” and “Kadosh”?

The Meshech Chochmah⁷, based on a comment of Rashi in Maseches Kiddushin,⁸ explains the difference as follows:

- ▷ “Kadosh” is an adjective, and describes something that itself is inherently holy.
- ▷ “Kodesh” is a noun, referring to the concept of holiness. Something that is “of kodesh” is associated with that holiness, but not itself inherently holy.

To illustrate with examples of each of these two categories, let us consider two items that can be consecrated for the Beis Hamikdash:

1. An animal can be consecrated to be brought as a korban. This animal attains inherent sanctity and is thus called “kadosh”.
2. An item can be consecrated for the funds of the Beis Hamikdash, to be sold and its value used for the avodah. This item is not inherently holy, but rather holy by association, i.e. “of kodesh”.

Is there any practical halachic difference between these two categories? Indeed there is, for an object that is holy by association can be replaced as the sanctified item – for example if it is sold or redeemed. By contrast, an object that is intrinsically holy can never lose its status or be replaced.

How does all this relate to our discussion?

TRACKING THE HOLINESS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The Gemara⁹ relates that, after the *chet ha’egel* (sin of the golden calf), when the Jewish people narrowly averted a Divine decree calling for their destruction, Moshe requested of Hashem that He pledge never to replace them with another people, and that Hashem granted this request. It turns out that, prior to this episode, the People of Israel could indeed have lost their unique sanctified status, whereas after Moshe’s request was granted, this sanctity could no longer be lost.

This historic development, says the Meshech Chochmah, is reflected in the two verses cited above referring to the Jewish people:

- ▷ The verse in Parshas Mishpatim refers to the period prior to the *chet ha’egel*. Therefore, the people are referred to there as “אֲנָשֵׁי קִדְשׁ – people of holiness,” reflecting the notion that their sanctity could be replaced.
- ▷ The verse in Parshas Re’eh describes the people well after the *chet ha’egel*; therefore, the

5 Ibid. 22:30.

6 Devarim 14:21.

7 Devarim ibid.

8 57b s.v. *kadosh*.

9 Berachos 7a.

terms used is “עם קדוש – a holy people,” denoting the permanent and non-transferable nature of their inherent sanctified status!

EFFECTING THE CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING THE SECOND LUCHOS

Let us proceed and ask: How was this change from associative holiness (*kodesh*) to intrinsic holiness (*kadosh*) brought about? In answer to this question, my father, Rabbi Isaac Bernstein zt”l,¹⁰ referred to a most fascinating discussion of the Beis Halevi in his derashos.¹¹ Based on numerous sources in Chazal, the Beis Halevi develops the idea that there was a fundamental difference between the two sets of *luchos* that were given to Moshe.

- ▷ The first set of *luchos* contained, in some form, a representation of the entire Torah: not only what we know as *Torah She’bichtav* (the written Torah) but also *Torah She’baal Peh* (the Oral Torah)
- ▷ The second set of *luchos* contained only *Torah She’bich tav*. At that stage, *Torah She’baal Peh* became entirely oral in nature, with no written representation on the *luchos* whatsoever.

The Beis Halevi asks: What are the implications of *Torah She’baal Peh* being present on the first *luchos*, but absent from the second?

He answers that as long as both areas of Torah were written on the *luchos*, the *luchos* constituted the repository of Torah. Thus, even as the Jewish people learned Torah and were connecting with holiness, they were effectively an “accessory to holiness,” equivalent to an ark that houses a Torah scroll. However, once the *Torah She’baal Peh* was no longer written on the *luchos*, the repository of that area of Torah became *the hearts and minds of the Jewish people themselves*. At this stage, they became like a Torah scroll itself and were no longer an accessory to holiness but rather an inherently holy object!

Putting these two ideas together, Rabbi Bernstein suggests that the shifting of *Torah She’baal Peh* after the *chet he’egel* from the *luchos* to the people, as described by the Beis Halevi, was the means through which they graduated from associative holiness to intrinsic holiness, as discussed by the Meshech Chochmah, thereby assuring their immutable status as Hashem’s people.

Perhaps this will give us a new insight into the famous statement of R’ Yochanan in the Gemara¹² that “The holy One, blessed be He, only sealed a covenant with Israel over the Oral Torah, as it says,¹³ ‘For based (על פי) on these words I have sealed a covenant with you.’” The verse cited by R’ Yochanan is from the end of Parshas Ki Sisa, after the second *luchos* had been written; for the eternal covenantal connection between Hashem and Israel is based on the shifting of the Oral Torah to the people themselves, thereby elevating them to a status of intrinsic holiness.

MOUNTAINS SUSPENDED BY THREADS

In light of the above, we can appreciate that an integral part of securing the lasting rehabilitation of the Jewish people came through connecting them to *Torah She’baal Peh*. With this in mind, perhaps we can now explain why, although Moshe was originally told by Hashem concerning the Mishkan and then Shabbos, at this stage he reversed the order and spoke about Shabbos first. The Mishnah¹⁴ characterizes Shabbos with the term “הררים התלויים בשערה – Mountains that are suspended by threads,” that is to say, a huge body of laws based on a very small amount of verses in the Torah. In

10 Shabbos Shuva Drasha 5749/1988.

11 Drush 18.

12 Gittin 60b.

13 Shemos 34:27. The phrase “על פי” is explained as a reference to תורה שבעל פה — the Oral Torah.

14 Chagigah 10a.

this regard, Shabbos represents a mitzvah whose details are predominantly known to us through *Torah She'baal Peh*. This is in marked contrast to the laws of the Mishkan, all of which are described extensively in the Written Torah in all their detail. Hence, as Moshe addresses the people for the first time after they have attained forgiveness for the *Egel*, he immediately engages in the area of Torah that will “activate” their new status of intrinsic holiness which will vouchsafe their enduring and immutable status as Hashem’s people.

We can now return to the question with which we opened our discussion, regarding the contrasting introductions of Shabbos and the Mishkan. We noted that Shabbos, which is discussed in only two verses, is introduced with the plural – “these are the things,” while the Mishkan, which is discussed at length over dozens of verses, is presented with the singular – “this is the matter”! R’ Yehonasan Eybeshutz, in his commentary *Tiferes Yehonasan* to the Torah, explains that the use of the plural form for Shabbos reflects the fact that it is derived from both areas of Torah – *Torah She'bichtav* and *Torah She'baal Peh*. By contrast, the Mishkan is presented with the singular form, since it derives entirely from the one area of *Torah She'bichtav*. We can appreciate that the reason this distinction between the two is being highlighted here is because that is what lies behind Moshe’s reversal of these topics, choosing to open with Shabbos so as to elevate the people to inherent kedushah via *Torah She'baal Peh*.

חזק חזק ונתחזק