

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## PARSHAS VAYAKHEL

### Centered around Holiness

וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עֵדֻת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם וּגו'

*Moshe assembled the entire congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them etc.*<sup>1</sup>

In all other occasion when Moshe speaks to the Jewish people, the verse just states that he spoke to them, even though he presumably assembled them first in order to do so. Why, on this occasion, is the assembling of the people mentioned explicitly in the verse?

When commanding the Jewish People regarding the construction of the Mishkan, Hashem says:

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם

*They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell in their midst.*<sup>2</sup>

We note that Hashem does not say He will dwell **בתוכו** — in it, i.e., the Mishkan, but rather **בתוכם** — in them, i.e., the Jewish People. What is it exactly about the Mishkan that will cause the Divine Presence to dwell within the Jewish People?

The Vilna Gaon offers a fascinating explanation of this matter, saying that the very fact that the people are united around the holy endeavor of building the Mishkan is what will cause the Divine Presence to dwell among them.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is not the existence of the Mishkan per se that brings Hashem close to His people, but the fact that it serves as a focal unifying point around which they encamp and live their lives! It is that unity that allows the entity known as the Assembly of Israel to become a dwelling for the Divine Presence.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 35:1.

<sup>2</sup> *Shemos* 25:8.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary to *Shir HaShirim* 1:17.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Vilna Gaon writes that this unification continues to a certain degree even if the Mishkan or Beis Hamikdash is not there. As we know, the halachah stipulates that when we pray we face toward Israel, and if we are in Israel we face toward Jerusalem. On a simple level, this is due to the special sanctity of the land of Israel, making it the place through which we wish to direct our prayers to Hashem. However, the Vilna Gaon explains that here, too, the idea is that since everyone is facing toward the same place, Jews from all over the world are united in their prayer, which, as mentioned above, has the effect of bringing the Divine Presence close to us and helping to ensure that our prayers will be accepted.

In light of this, we can understand why the verse emphasizes Moshe assembling the people on this occasion, for the topic he was presenting to them – the construction of the Mishkan – would only be capable of achieving its function of allowing the Divine presence to reside among Israel if they were assembled and unified around it.

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### **Raised Hearts and Generous Spirits**

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וַיָּבֵאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נָשְׂאוֹ לְבוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר נָדְבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה לְמִלְאכַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד

*Every man whose heart raised him up came, and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of Hashem for the Tent of Meeting.<sup>5</sup>*

The verse appears to be describing the generosity of those who donated to the Mishkan in two different ways. And indeed, various commentators discuss how the two phrases in the verse reflect two different types of generosity. For example, the Ohr Hachaim explains that the two phrases reflect two different types of donation:

- ▷ *Every man whose heart raised him up* – refers to those who were inspired to donate beyond (higher) than their means
  
- ▷ *Everyone whose spirit motivated him* – refers to those who donated in keeping with their means.

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<sup>5</sup> Shemos 35:21.

In a somewhat different vein, The Rama<sup>6</sup> explains that the two phrases refer, not to the donations themselves, but to the differing motivations behind the donation. Some people are motivated to give due to natural generosity, while others may not be naturally generous, but will donate to a worthy cause based on higher spiritual faculties within them that motivate them to do what is right. Accordingly:

- ▷ *Every man whose heart raised him up* – refers to those who were motivated by their “heart”, i.e. their natural generosity.
- ▷ *Everyone whose spirit motivated him* – refers to those who were moved to give on account of their “spirit”, i.e. their higher faculties, even though they may not have been naturally generous.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the above, the Ramban explains that these two phrases are actually talking about two different aspects of the Mishkan for which people came forward.

- ▷ The second phrase, “*whose spirit motivated (nadvah) him,*” indeed refers to the generosity of those who donated.
- ▷ The first phrase, “*whose heart inspired him,*” refers, not to donations people made, but to their volunteering to become involved in the construction itself:

*For there were none among them who had learned these skills from a teacher, or had themselves trained in them. Rather, these people found within their nature that they could do these things and their hearts were elevated in the ways of Hashem, to come before Moshe and say to him “I will do all that my master commands”*

Beautiful words!

Indeed, in this idea, we can see a worthy conclusion of Chumash Shemos – the Chumash of Redemption. This concept embraces not only liberation from the temporal constraints of national slavery in Egypt (מצרים), but also from the personal constraints (מיצרים) that people were able to throw off as they were inspired to access their talents and capabilities, stepping forward to make their contribution toward the most elevated of causes.

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6 *Toras Ha’olah*, cited in *Hakesav Ve’Hakabbalah* to our verse.

7 See also commentaries of Malbim and *Haamek Davar* to our verse