

Parshas Vayakhel begins with Shabbos and continues to discuss the construction of the Mishkan. This connection between the Mishkan and Shabbos has a number of aspects to it.

Why is the Mishkan important? Why is it so central?

The posuk tell us that there is a mitzvah to fear the Mikdash. But Chazal explain that it is not that we need to fear the physical Mikdash but the Presence that dwells in it.

The Kosel has a central place in contemporary Israeli life. The Kosel is used as a national symbol of Jewish sovereignty. The government uses the Kotel plaza to swear in the new paratroopers. But this is not the point of the mokom hamikdosh. The mokom hamikdosh is a reminder of Hashem's presence and closeness to Klal Yisroel. It has only a spiritual purpose.

There are all kinds of negotiations about which territories to give back to the Arabs, but the Kotel is not for negotiation. Why? Not because of the kedushoh—it is because of the national pride. But that is the opposite of what Chazal say. To the degree that you feel the kedushoh of the presence of Hashem in the Mishkan and Mikdosh, it serves its intended purpose. Otherwise, there is nothing special about a building and a plot of land on a hill.

There is another kedushoh which functions to connect us to the presence of Hashem, called kedushas Shabbos. But if you have to choose which type of kedushoh is more important—the kedushoh of the Shechinoh in the Mishkan or kedushas Shabbos, the answer is Shabbos. The Torah places Shabbos in this parsha before the building of the Mishkan because it takes precedence over the Mishkan.

There is a story about Rav Chaim that my Rebbi ve'Mori repeated and amplified after the Six Day War. It was the end of World War I and Rav Chaim was in Minsk being told about all the destruction of the Jewish communities and massive slaughter during the war. He was visibly shaken. Someone tried to console Rav Chaim that all this suffering might be worth it if it will bring moshiach closer. Rav Chaim answered that the kedushoh of a single Jew is so great that we violate Shabbos for it. Then certainly the coming of moshiach is not worth a single Jew. My Rebbe continued this theme when there was a discussion after the Six Day War regarding what to give back. He said if there will be less danger to Jewish lives by giving back the Kosel, it should be given back. Even the Kosel is also not worth more than the neshomo of a single Jew. And we are mechallel Shabbos to save a Jew.

The beis hamikdosh is just a means to bring the presence of the Shechinoh into our lives. Without it, we still have Shabbos and limud haTorah to fill the void of Shechinoh. Many midrashim say that Shabbos is the ultimate way of bringing Shechinoh into our lives—especially through limud haTorah. Whatever the value of building the Mishkan may be, Shabbos is more important.

The Israeli government has its priorities backwards. They think the Kotel is precious and Shabbos can be trampled upon. The opposite is the case.

The parsha continues to name the people who will be in charge of the construction. It repeats what was stated in Parshas Ki Sisoh. The midrash explains why Hashem gave the unique wisdom to Betzalel. Hashem chose Betzalel specifically. He didn't leave it to Moshe to go on a talent hunt to find someone fit to build the Mishkan.

Betzalel was the son of Uri who was the son of Chur from Shevet Yehudah. He built his life to continue the tzidkus of his ancestors. Chur was right behind Aharon and Yehoshua in stature. He, along with Aharon, supported Moshe in davening for Hashem's protection in the battle with Amolek.

He was moser nefesh and was killed rather than concede to making the egel. Hashem promised Chur that his sacrifice will be rewarded by giving his children a special position. Betzalel was the one who continued in the path of his father in particular and Shevet Yehudah in general.

Yehudah earned the position of being the kings of the Jewish people because he admitted to the maaseh of Tomor. She was willing to be thrown into fire to avoid embarrassing Yehudah in public. She was a tremendous baal middos. Yehudah was willing to embarrass himself and avoid corrupting the truth to protect his private honor. He took responsibility for Binyomin. Chur was similarly moser nefesh to avoid corrupting the truth.

The Ramban points out that Jews in Egypt were slaves doing gross, unskilled labor. They were working with bricks and mortar and mud and straw. They had no exposure to any fine crafts and artisan's skill. But somehow, Klal Yisroel were suddenly able to create all these fine works of tremendous beauty and fine art with gold, silver and precious stones.

Hashem gave Betzalel and his artisans this incredible wisdom. We like to take credit for figuring things out in learning and in life in general. How many people don't take credit for an amazing insight they have? How many people say it was an idea that fell into their minds from above? But in reality, we get our wisdom from Hashem and He gives it to us to put more into Torah.

There is an ongoing tension between recognizing hashgocho and our hishtadlus. How do we negotiate that tension? Rav Avrohom ben HoRambam says parnossoh comes from Hashem. The closer a person is to Hashem and the more he recognizes Hashem in his life, and the more beloved he is by Hashem, the more abundance of chessed will come down to him. Parnossoh will come more easily. A person will be given greater insight and wisdom to make his parnossoh, in direct proportion to the ahavah and dveikus he has.

When the Netziv had a difficult sugya he was working on late at night, he would walk down to the bridge to the kever of Rav Chaim Volozhin to daven to get the right pshat in the sugya. He writes a number of times in his seforim that he davened to Hashem to receive chochmoh, and he received the insight he needed. The Netziv, with all his greatness and hard work in Torah, still recognized that his insight came from Hashem. If you deeply believe it, you will get more of it.

The midrash in Eichoh tells us a story. There was a Greek philosopher who saw Yirmiyahu crying over the churbon and mocked him. Why is such an intelligent man who taught me such deep wisdom crying over a pile of broken wood and stone? Yirmiyahu responded that your wisdom and my wisdom came from that building. Once it was destroyed, that wisdom is now out of reach. The midrash is telling us that the wisdom of the Greek philosophers came from the Nevi'im. Yirmiyahu got his chochmas haTorah—and with it all true chochmoh about the world—from the closeness to the Shechinoh that came as a result of the Beis Hamikdosh.

Ramban says you need years of training to master the skill for fashioning gold and silver and embroidery of delicate designs. The fact that Klal Yisroel were able to construct the Mishkan and all its keilim was supernatural. It makes no sense naturally. They received a special brachah from Hashem. Parnosoh is the same way. We don't always understand how it works and when it works.

Hashem gives special brachah to those who have ahavas Hashem and realize that all chochmoh comes from Hashem. They get a special zechus from their deep desire to fulfill the will of Hashem.

The zechus that Yehudah had and that Chur had to be moser nefesh in their bakoshas hoemes, translated into that special chochmoh to Betzalel and Shlomo Hamelech. But it was not a one-time event. It is a secret for all success in learning and in life generally. When you realize that it comes from Hashem and feel it deeply, then Hashem responds with brachah. The more you love and feel dependent on Hashem, the more Hashem helps you in your endeavors. The corollary of this is that if you aren't doing the will of Hashem, don't expect Hashem to give

you success. All the talent and gifts won't help you if Hashem isn't with you.

The posuk says not only did Betzalel and Oholiav from Shevet Dan receive the chochmoh from Hashem, they also received the wisdom of how to teach others whom Hashem saw were fit to receive these skills. How do Hashem see fit? Those who were inspired—those who wanted to give back to Hashem everything they would be given.

This Ramban is critical for us in our lives at all times. A person had to have a desire to use the talents that were necessary to build the Mishkan for avodas Hashem. When he had that desire, he received the necessary chochmoh.

This is true about the talents Hashem gives to us. We can't take credit for them. We can't take them for granted and think they were given to boost our ego and lord it above the less talented people. They were given to us for a purpose and we have to grow closer to Hashem as a result. We need to figure out how Hashem wants us to use it for greater avodas Hashem.