

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TERUMAH • 4 ADAR 1 5782 FEBRUARY 5, 2022 • VOL 29 NO. 18

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Mosquito's Bite

"They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length..." (25:10)

The creation of the Panama Canal must rank as one of the greatest engineering achievements of the past two centuries. Apart from the unbelievable amounts of earth that had to be moved, disease was a major factor in the difficulty of building the Canal. The first attempt to construct a canal through what was then Colombia's province of Panama began on January 1, 1881. The project was inspired by the diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, who was able to raise considerable funds in France as a result of the huge profits generated by his successful construction of the Suez Canal. Although the Panama Canal needed to be only 40 percent as long as the Suez Canal, it was much more of an engineering challenge due to the combination of tropical rain forests, debilitating climate, the need for canal locks and the lack of any ancient route to follow.

Lesseps wanted a sea-level canal (like the Suez), but he visited the site only a few times, during the dry season which lasts only four months of the year. His men were totally unprepared for the rainy season, during which the Chagres River, where the Canal started, became a raging torrent, rising up to 10 m (35 ft). The dense jungle was alive with venomous snakes, insects and spiders, but the worst challenges were yellow fever, malaria and other tropical diseases, which killed thousands of

workers. By 1884, the death rate was over 200 per month. Public Health measures were ineffective because the role of the mosquito as a disease vector was then unknown.

The United States took over the project when the French pulled out and Colonel William C. Gorgas was appointed chief sanitation officer of the canal construction project in 1904. Gorgas implemented a range of measures to minimize the spread of deadly diseases, particularly yellow fever and malaria, which had recently been shown to be mosquito-borne following the work of Dr. Carlos Finlay and Dr. Walter Reed. Despite opposition from the commission (one member said his ideas were 'barmy'), Gorgas persisted, and after two years of extensive work, the mosquito-spread diseases were nearly eliminated. Even after all that effort, about 5,600 workers died of disease and accidents during the US construction phase of the Canal.

As David McCullough relates in *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914*:

"In mid-September, while placing mosquitoes on patients in a fever ward, Lazear saw a free mosquito of undetermined species land on his hand and he purposefully allowed the insect to take its feed of blood. Five days later Lazear had what Gorgas described as one of the most violent cases of yellow

fever he had ever attended. On September 25, the day Lazear died, he was in such wild delirium that it took two men to hold him in bed.

“Convinced now of the truth of Finlay’s theory, Reed pressed on with further experiments proving conclusively that *Stegomyia fasciata* was the carrier, and that neither filth nor “fomites,” the term used for the soiled clothes or bedding of yellow-fever patients, had anything whatever to do with spreading the disease.

“For twenty nights, as part of one experiment, a doctor and three volunteer soldiers, confined to a one-room shack, slept in the soiled pajamas of yellow-fever patients, on beds reeking of black vomit and other excreta; and for all the discomfort of the experience, none of them suffered the least sign of illness.”

The physical world can be a bewildering place. It’s easy for us to smile at the ignorance of those who

found the concept of a mosquito as a bearer of disease ‘barmy.’ But how much more are the laws of the spiritual unknown! And moreover, they are unknowable. How can you see that a Jew who brazenly turns on a light on Shabbat ‘burns’ much more than the filament of the bulb?

“They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length...”

This week’s Torah portion contains precise physical dimensions that allow us to enter a spiritual world. Without those precise formulas, such as the formula of Shabbat or *tefillin*, we would have no idea how to enter these worlds. And our attempts to do so might be more dangerous than a mosquito’s bite.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

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Q & A

Questions

1. How many types of items were the Jews to donate?
2. The donation of silver for the Mishkan differed from the donation of the other items. How?
3. What property do techelet and argaman share that orot eilim m'adamim do not share?
4. What property do the above three share that shesh and orot techashim do not share?
5. Onkelos translates "tachash" as "sasgona." Why?
6. What kind of trees did Yaakov plant in Egypt?
7. Describe two uses of:
 - (a) oil ,
 - (b) spices,
 - (c) jewels.
8. The aron was made with three boxes, one inside the other. Exactly how tall was the outer box?
9. Why is the Torah referred to as "testimony"?
10. What did the faces of the keruvim resemble?
11. On what day of the week was the lechem hapanim baked?
12. What does miksha mean?
13. What was the purpose of the menorah's gevi'im (cups)?
14. How did Moshe know the shape of the menorah?
15. What designs were embroidered into the tapestries of the Mishkan?
16. What is meant by "standing wood"?
17. How long was the Mishkan?
18. How wide was the interior of the Mishkan?
19. Why was the altar coated with nechoshet?
20. What function did the copper yeteidot serve?

Answers

1. 25:2 - 13.
2. 25:3 - No fixed amount of the other items was required. The silver was given as a fixed amount: a half-shekel.
3. 25:4,5 - They are wool; orot eilim are not.
4. 25:4,5 - They are dyed; shesh and orot techashim are not.
5. 25:5 - The tachash delights (sas) in its multi-colors (g'vanim).
6. 25:5 - Arazim ~ cedars.
7. 25:6-7:
 - (a) The oil was lit in the menorah and used for anointing.
 - (b) The spices were used in the anointing oil and for the incense.
 - (c) The precious stones were for the ephod and the choshen.
8. 25:11 - The outer box was one and a half amot plus a tefach plus a little bit, because it rose a little bit above the kaporet. (The kaporet was a tefach thick. ~ see 25:17)
9. 25:16 - It testifies that G-d commanded us to keep the mitzvot.
10. 25:18 - The faces of children.
11. 25:29 - Friday.
12. 25:31 - Hammered.
13. 25:31 - Purely ornamental.
14. 25:40 - G-d showed Moshe a menorah of fire.
15. 26:1 - On one side a lion; on the other side an eagle.
16. 26:15 - The wooden beams were to be upright and not stacked one upon the other.
17. 26:16 - 30 amot.
18. 26:23 - 10 amot.
19. 27:2 - To atone for brazenness.
20. 27:19 - They secured the curtains against the wind.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

On Hooks and Hangers

The sixth letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, VAV, is named after the Hebrew word *vav* (“hook”), because that letter is orthographically represented by a symbol that very much resembles a “hook” on which things may be hung. Cognates of the word *vav* only appear 13 times in the Bible, all instances of which are in the chapters of Exodus that deal with the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 26, 27, 36, 38). In every single one of those instances, Targum Onkelos renders the word untranslated in his Aramaic translation, leaving the word as simply *vav*. In this essay, we will explore four words for “hook/hanger” in Hebrew, but along the way we will learn all sorts of interesting factoids related to such diverse languages as English.

The early grammarians like Menachem Ibn Saruk, Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach, and Radak are unanimous in explaining that the root of *vav* is VAV-VAV, although Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814) seems somewhat inclined to view the word’s root as the monoliteral VAV. Interestingly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843–1916) supposes that the Hebrew word *vav* is not actually comprised from the root VAV or VAV-VAV in the grammatical sense of words derived from roots comprised of letters. Rather, he contends that this word derives from the orthographic appearance of the sixth letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, which looks like a “hook” (similar to the Arabic numerals 6 and 9 with which we might be more familiar). Because of this resemblance, the letter VAV itself came to be synonymous with “hook” in early Hebrew, but not that the word *vav* actually means “hook.” Rabbi Marcus even goes as far as to claim that this crude nomenclature was later abandoned once the Jews entered the Holy Land, as evidenced by the fact that the word *vav* appears nowhere else in the Bible besides the chapters in Exodus cited above.

Rashi (to Ex. 27:10) explains that the Hebrew word *vavim* means *ankliyyot*. This word appears several times in the Mishnah as well (Pesachim 5:9, Tamid 3:5, Middot 3:5, and Keilim 12:2-3) in the sense of “hook,” especially the barbed part of a hook.

The Mishnaic Hebrew word *ankliyyot*, in turn, appears to actually be a Greek loanword, and seems to be related to such English words as *anchor*, *angle*, *angling*, *ankle*, and *hang*. According to linguists, Greek and English/Germanic are derived from the Proto-Indo-European language (PIE), and the ultimate forebear of these words is the proto-Indo-European word *ang/ank* (“to bend”). Some scholars even trace the name of the Angles – one of the Germanic Anglo-Saxon tribes that occupied what later became known as *England* – to the word in question. They argue that the Angles’ original homeland was a hook-shaped peninsula that protruded from the European continent, or that these tribesman were expert fisherman or descended from expert fisherman who were adept at angling “fishhooks” to catch fish. If this is true, then the word *onklyyyot* also serves as the ultimate etymon of the English word *English*.

Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino writes in *Ohel Moed* (his lexicon of Hebrew synonyms) that an alternate word for “hook/hanger” in Hebrew is *shfataim*, which appears only once in Scripture (Ezek. 40:43). Targum (there) translates this word as *ankliyyot*, although, in this case, it is spelled with an initial AYIN (as opposed to *ankliyyot* mentioned above which was spelled with an ALEPH at the beginning). This explanation is also cited by Rashi and Radak (there).

However, Abarbanel (in his commentary to Ezekiel) and Radak (in his commentary to Ezekiel and in his *Sefer HaShorashim*, entry SHIN-PEH-TAV) offer an alternate explanation of *shfataim* as a

“place” upon which pots were placed (that is, a sort of stovetop). This explanation is also implied by *Machberet Menachem* categorizing this word in his fifth category of the SHIN-PEH root. Rabbi Pappenheim also follows this approach in explaining how *shfataim* can be traced to the biliteral root SHIN-PEH (“slithering”). The core meaning of that root refers to moving around without lifting one’s feet from the ground, like Balaam who was said to walk *shefi* (Num. 23:3) and other magicians (*ashafim*), whose name implies that they did the same (Dan. 1:20, 2:2, 2:10). Other derivatives of this root include *shephiphon* (“snake”), a creature which ambulates about via creeping and crawling on the ground, with its body always touching the floor and never lifting itself up. In that sense, the *shfataim* refers to the spot where pots are placed, but from which they are not lifted (until they have finished cooked). See also Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency’s commentary to Yechezkel 40:43, which explains *shfataim* as a sort of “ledge/lip” that will surround the perimeter of the future Temple’s Table.

A third Hebrew word for “hook/hanger” – one that Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino does not explicitly list as a synonym to *vav* and *shfataim* – is the word *agmon*. This word appears five times in Scripture (Job 40:26, 41:12, Isa. 9:13, 19:15, 58:5), and Targum also renders it as *ankliyyot* (at least in Job 40:26). Elsewhere, Targum (to Isa. 9:13, 19:15) translates the word *agmon* as *hegmon* (an explanation also cited in Radak’s *Sefer HaShorashim*). This latter word is also of Greek origin, and is the antecedent of the English word *hegemony*. (By the way, Targum to Isa. 58:5 leaves *agmon* untranslated).

Machberet Menachem defines *agmon* as a cane with a hooked top. Radak explains that *agmon* refers to a certain type of reed, arguing that ALEPH-GIMMEL-MEM ought to be understood in light of GIMMEL-MEM-ALPEH (via metathesis), from which derives from the word *gome* (“reed”). Rabbi Pappenheim makes a similar point, drawing on the biliteralist tradition to trace *agmon* and *gome* to the two-letter root GIMMEL-MEM (“absorbent or spongy matter”). The most basic word derived from this root is *agam* (“swamp/marshland”), on

account of such a place’s sponge-like ability to soak up so much water, yet always remain wet. In light of this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *gome* refers to a sort of “spongy reed” that grows in such marshy wetlands, and *agmon* primarily refers to a sort of thistle with a hooked top that also commonly grows in an *agam*. As Rabbi Pappenheim explains it, the *agmon* was commonly used as a fishhook and eventually the word itself came to refer to any hooked or bent item.

In short, there are seemingly three words in Biblical Hebrew and one in Mishnaic Hebrew that mean “hook.” The Biblical Hebrew *vav* seems to be the most basic word for “hook,” although it only appears in Exodus and nowhere else in the Bible. The Biblical Hebrew words *shfataim* and *agmon* also seem to mean “hook,” albeit some commentators explain those words differently. Finally, the Mishnaic Hebrew *ankliyyot* is actually of Greek origin and is, in fact, related to the very word “hook” in English and the word *English* itself!

As I wrote this article, I began to wonder if the Greek word *onkliyyot* is somehow related to the Greek personal name Onkelos, borne by the author of the famous Targum that translated the Pentateuch into Aramaic. A similar Greek name, Akylas, was borne by another famous translator of the Torah. Some have even argued that the two translators were actually one and the same. This question was discussed at length in the book *Aquila and Onkelos* by A. E. Silverstone (Manchester University Press, 1970). That book cites a letter that Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), also known as Shadal, wrote to the Maskilic scholar Rabbi Shlomo Yehuda Rappaport of Prague (1786-1867). In that letter, Shadal argues that the Greek word *onkliyyot* actually derives from the Hebrew root AYIN-KUF-LAMMED (“crooked”) and because of this, people more familiar with this Hebrew term mispronounced the name Onkelos as Akylas. (The fact that Onkelos is spelled with an initial ALEPH and Akylas is spelled with an initial AYIN need not bother us, because we have already seen above that when it comes to this Greek word, the letters ALEPH and AYIN are used interchangeability).

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE CLOUDS OF GLORY

The Clouds of Glory say, “Even in clarity He forms clouds; the clouds shined His light.” (*Iyov* 37:11)

The Clouds of Glory sing of Hashem’s fatherly care for His chosen nation. When the Jewish People wandered through the wilderness, He surrounded them on all sides with six Clouds, and an additional Cloud floated ahead of them to lead them. They protected the Jewish People from the elements, killed dangerous snakes and scorpions, and even flattened mountains in their way. Moreover, they shone with the splendor of Hashem’s glory. Throughout the forty years in the desert, the nation did not require sunlight.

They thus sing how, contrary to rainclouds which are formed from moisture and block light, the

Clouds of Glory are formed “even in clarity,” without moisture, and “shined His light” upon the Jewish nation.

We are obliged never to forget how Hashem sheltered us in the desert. We should likewise care for fellow Jews in the way He did and still does for us. In doing so, we emulate Hashem and reveal His glory in the world.

- Sources: *Beraisa d’Melech HaMishkan*; *Mechilta (Beshalach)*; *Avos D’Rabbi Nassan* (25)

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem commands Moshe to build a Mishkan (Sanctuary) and supplies him with detailed instructions. The Jewish People are asked to contribute precious metals and stones, fabrics, skins, oil and spices. In the Mishkan's outer courtyard there is an Altar for the burnt offerings and a Laver for washing. The Tent of Meeting is divided by a curtain into two chambers. The outer chamber is accessible only to the *Kohanim*, the descendants of Aharon. This contains the Table of showbreads, the *Menorah*, and the Golden Altar for incense. Entrance to the innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, was permitted only for the *Kohen Gadol*, and only once a year, on Yom Kippur. Here is the Ark that held the Ten Commandments inscribed on the two tablets of stone which Hashem gave to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai. All of the utensils and vessels, as well as the instructions for the construction of the Mishkan, are described in great detail.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 3) – BIRKAT HA'AVOT

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The blessing continues with the words, *“The great, mighty and awesome G-d, the supreme G-d, Who bestows beneficial kindness and creates everything, Who recalls the kindness of the Patriarchs and brings a Redeemer to their children’s children for His Name’s sake, with love.”*

The *Amidah* opens with powerfully descriptive expressions for G-d. G-d is “great,” “mighty,” “awesome” and “supreme.” These descriptions all focus on G-d’s infinite might and conjure up visions of extreme and exacting judgment. Yet, the *Amidah* also describes G-d as being the wellspring of beneficial kindness. The two descriptions seem to be dichotomous. On the one hand, G-d is all-powerful and exacting. At the same time, on the other hand, He is compassionate and beneficent. Certainly, in reality, both of those descriptions are perfectly accurate. G-d expects from us to live our lives according to His Will, constantly studying His Torah so that we can flourish by living His commandments. But, in His infinite wisdom, G-d understands that our shortcomings can dampen our spiritual aspirations and lead to inappropriate behavior. He therefore relates to us both as the Omnipotent G-d, demanding that we constantly expand our spiritual vistas – and also relates to us as our All-Merciful G-d, Who takes into account our human frailties.

The first Rebbe of the Karlin-Stolin Chassidut, Rabbi Aharon ben Yaakov known as the Beit Aharon (1736-1772), once instructed two of his followers to study the chapter that describes Gehinom in the

classic work *Reishit Chochmah*. He asked them to come back to him in three months’ time and tell him what they had learned and internalized. On their return, the Rebbe asked the first one what he had gleaned. The Chassid started telling the Rebbe how frightening it was. The author of the *Reishit Chochmah* describes Gehinom in vivid detail, and the Chassid told his Rebbe that he was left trembling each time he thought about the punishment awaiting a person for each sin he has done. On hearing his Chassid’s reaction, the Rebbe told him, “Gehinom is not as awful as its description. We have a compassionate Father. When you repent for your actions, you will be forgiven by your Father in Heaven.”

The Rebbe then turned to the second Chassid and asked him what he had learned. The Chassid repeated what he had studied in the book, without any sign of discomfort or concern. It was obvious that whatever he had learned had not impacted him. So, the Rebbe explained to him that the portrayal of Gehinom appearing in *Reishit Chochmah* is simply a parable. “You should know” said the Rebbe, “that Gehinom is far, far worse than any description you might find in a book!”

After the two left the Rebbe’s presence, his attendant asked him how it was possible that the two opposing approaches taken by the Rebbe could coexist together. “Can we rely on Divine mercy to mitigate the agony of Gehinom, like you told the first Chassid? Or, is Gehinom the terrifying place of

unmitigated suffering as you described to the second Chassid?" The Rebbe replied, "If a person is afraid of Gehinom, he has nothing to fear. But if he isn't fearful, he has a lot to be afraid of."

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (Tur, Orach Chaim 113) notes that the blessing "Who redeemed Israel," which directly precedes the *Amidah*, is located next to the first blessing of the *Amidah*. This teaches us, he says, that even if there would come a time when the merits of the forefathers would be exhausted, we can be assured that G-d's promise to redeem us is never in doubt and is guaranteed to be fulfilled. This is the meaning of the phrase "for His Name's sake." Of course, the possibility of the forefathers' merits being used up is virtually inconceivable. Nevertheless, the Tur emphasizes the infinite extent of G-d's love for us, His chosen nation.

Rabbi Menachem Ziemba (1883-1943, Poland) was one of the most brilliant and incisive Torah scholars of his generation. He was fluent in the entirety of both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, and was one of the most influential members of Poland's spiritual leadership. His empathy and his uncanny ability to understand the heart of each problem made him a much sought-after address for those seeking advice and succor. Together with his fellow Jews, he was incarcerated in the infamous Warsaw Ghetto, where he worked ceaselessly to assist all those in need and to establish secret locations throughout the ghetto where Torah was learned without cessation until the ghetto's final moments. According to eye witness accounts, Rabbi Ziemba was a never-ending source of inspiration and optimism to all inhabitants

of the ghetto until the day he was murdered by the Nazis. He points out that the words "recalls" and "brings" in this blessing are both in the present tense. At first glance, it would seem more fitting if the words had been written in the future tense, signifying our belief that we will be ultimately redeemed. Rabbi Ziemba explains that G-d made an irrevocable covenant with Avraham (Ber.15:13), and that Divine commitment means that the Jewish nation will always survive. Despite the best attempts of the various nations of the world to destroy us, we are still here awaiting the glorious moment when the unconditional redemption will take place, may it happen very soon! In effect, this means that each day G-d "remembers" the forefathers and that each day draws the redemption closer – hence the present tense.

In the Book of Yeshayahu (63:9), the prophet declares, "With His love and with His compassion He redeemed them; He lifted them and bore them all the days of the world." The Malbim writes that despite the fact that G-d's Presence is concealed in this world – sometimes to the point that the future looks truly bleak – He is nevertheless constantly sustaining and supporting us, His chosen nation. And, when the time comes, G-d, in all His resplendent glory, will redeem us. The concept of G-d redeeming us with love indicates that when the time of the final redemption arrives, G-d will let us feel as if we are being redeemed because we deserve it due to our merits, and not because of His overwhelming benevolence towards us. As a result, we will be able to rejoice with genuine pleasure, not feeling inadequate and ashamed at our lack of accomplishments.

To be continued...

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Mo'ed Katan 9-15

The Measure of a Mitzvah

Rabbi Yonason ben Asamai and Rabbi Yehuda ben Geirim both said, “One verse refers to a mitzvah that can be done by others, whereas the other verse refers to a mitzvah that cannot be done by others.”

The *gemara* relates an occasion when Rabbi Yonason ben Asamai and Rabbi Yehuda ben Geirim were learning Masechet Nedarim in the Yeshiva of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. They displayed signs of very wise and pious Torah scholars, and when they departed, Rabbi Shimon sent his son to catch up with them to request a *brachah* from them. When he found them, he heard them teaching the meaning of two verses in Sefer Mishlei that appear to contradict one another.

One verse states, “The Torah is more precious than pearls, and all your desirable things cannot be compared to it.” (Mishlei 3:15) Rashi on our *daf* explains this to mean that a person should “nullify” his personal desires in order to pursue Torah study.

These two Sages note that the verse says “*your* desirable things,” implying that only personal pursuits should be desisted from in order to study Torah. However, “things of *Heaven*” – i.e. mitzvahs – should be pursued even when a person is involved in Torah study. This verse seems to teach that a person who is studying Torah should pause from his learning if there is a mitzvah that needs to be fulfilled.

Another verse in Mishlei, note these Sages, seems to contradict this teaching. Because Torah wisdom is better than pearls, and *all* desired things are not comparable to it. The phrase “all desired things” includes mitzvahs. And this verse seems to teach that

a person who is studying Torah should not pause from his learning in order to fulfill a mitzvah.

Rabbi Yonason ben Asamai and Rabbi Yehuda ben Geirim reconcile the apparent contradiction taught in these verses regarding a person who is studying Torah and faced with a mitzvah that needs to be fulfilled. The first verse implies that he should pause to fulfill the mitzvah, whereas the second verse implies that he should not. The Sages explain how this can be reconciled: “One verse refers to a mitzvah that can be done by others, whereas the other verse refers to a mitzvah that cannot be done by others.” In other words, if a mitzvah cannot be done by others, a person should pause from his learning to fulfill it, but if it can be done by others, he should continue his studies while others fulfill it.

This concept is taught in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 246:18. “When a person is faced with the opportunity to both study Torah and to fulfill a mitzvah, if it is possible for the mitzvah to be fulfilled by others, he should not pause from this study; and if it is not possible to be fulfilled by others, he should pause to fulfill the mitzvah and then return to his Torah study.”

In any practical case, one should consult with a local authority as needed in order to clarify what constitutes a “mitzvah that cannot be fulfilled by others” in any given case. For example, if a student is studying Torah and knows of an injured student who needs lunch brought to his room, may the student involved in learning Torah assume that other Yeshiva students not currently learning will be able to fulfill the mitzvah to bring the lunch?

Commentaries point out that although as a rule a person who is involved in a mitzvah is exempt from doing another mitzvah that arises at the time, a person involved in Torah study is an exception. “A greatness of Torah study is that it leads to action” – i.e. mitzvah fulfillment. Torah study is not meant to be purely academic. Rather, it should not only instruct but also compel the Torah student to fulfill the teachings of the Torah.

When I was a newcomer to Eretz Yisrael and a *talmid* of HaRav Moshe Shapiro, *zatzal*, I once asked him a *sheilah* pertaining to this halacha in Shulchan Aruch. I began, “There seems to be an almost daily *levayah* (funeral) for a great and holy Torah scholar, and my understanding is that there is an obligation to attend

each one, wherever it may be. Then I asked, “Am I obligated to pause from my Torah study to attend them all?” The Rav replied that he heard from a great Rabbi of an earlier generation to carefully look at the concluding words in Shulchan Aruch that pertain to the obligation to pause Torah study to fulfill a mitzvah: “And then *he will return* to his Torah study.” He explained, “One has an obligation to also return to his Torah study, and must therefore determine appropriate criteria for when to go to a *levaya* and when to stay in the Yeshiva to learn Torah.”

▪ *Mo'ed Katan 9b*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Mishkan and Mikdash

The two words for “sanctuary” in the Torah are used seemingly interchangeably. We are instructed to build a “*mikdash*,” but then the structure is referred to as a “*mishkan*.” Moshe is instructed, *they shall make for Me a mikdash and I will dwell among them.* (Shemot 25:8)

The construction of this *Mishkan* is then described in great detail and is followed, in *Sefer Vayikra*, by the laws of the Temple, and the laws of sanctification of life. At the conclusion of these laws, the Torah restates that G-d will *place His dwelling among us.* (Vaykira 26:11)

From the placement of these two declarations, and what comes in-between, it is clear that the objective of having G-d dwell among us extends far beyond the Presence of G-d in the Temple. Rather, it refers to His presence in our midst, in our national and private lives. That is our task: to build a *mikdash* out of our lives. When we construct the *mikdash*, G-d promises His Presence, protection and blessing in our midst— His dwelling (*mishkan*) will be among us.

“*Mikdash*” refers not only to the physical structure that is to follow, but also to the spiritual form of our task. We are to consecrate our lives to the fulfillment of Torah, sanctifying our every action and interaction. In return, we are promised *mishkan*: the *Shechina*, G-d’s presence, protection and blessing. The two concepts reach their high point in the Tabernacle. It is the place of consecration, the place where we are reminded most acutely to Whom our lives are to be devoted, and it is the place of G-d’s greatest closeness to us. It is the physical place in which the eternal covenant between G-d and His people is given expression, but it can only give expression to what already exists in the hearts of the people. The true location of the *mikdash*, and in turn, the *mishkan*, is “*b’tochechem*” – within us. If we live in faithful observance and in sanctity, we will merit the *Shechina* in our midst.

▪ *Sources: Commentary, Shemot 25:3-8*