

## This Week's Parshah - Parshas Vayakhel - Pekudei

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Otto *ben* Julius a"h

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

### A Mountain on Top of a Hair

#### Big Things in Small Packages

When contemplating the immensity of the scope of wisdom contained in the Torah, we are awestruck not only by its vastness, but by the unusual phenomenon that so much is contained within such little space. Consider, for example, the statement of the Mishnah in Chagigah (1:8) concerning a number of large bodies in *halachah*:

הַלְכוֹת שַׁבָּת חֲגִיגוֹת וְהַמְעִילוֹת, הָרִי הֵם פְּהָרִים הַתְּלוּיִן בְּשַׁעֲרָהּ, שֶׁהֵן מִקְרָא מְעֻט וְהַלְכוֹת מְרֻבּוֹת.

“The *halachos* of Shabbos, *chagigos* (specialized festival offerings) and *me'ilos* (laws governing the unauthorized usage of sanctified objects) are like mountains suspended upon a strand of hair; that is, their particulars are numerous, but they are derived from the briefest of scriptural references.”

For the moment, let us just focus on the first of these three items. Maseches Shabbos, in *mishnayos*, contains more chapters (twenty-four) than almost any other tractate. The Gemara volume likewise contains more *blatt* (folios) than almost any other (157). Over 100 *simanim* in Shulchan Aruch are devoted merely to recording the final, conclusive *halachic* decisions of this area of observance. And how many commentaries, responsa and other *sefarim* have been produced over the centuries to further clarify the many crucial Shabbos issues? It is not uncommon to find numerous works covering a single *melachah* (form of labor) or even just a subsection of a single *melachah*! And a substantial portion of this huge mountain of thousands or millions of pages worth of material covering this subject can be traced backed to a nuanced phrase or an extra letter in the biblical text.

The Chofetz Chaim elaborates on this theme (*Shem Olam, Sha'ar Hachzakas HaTorah, ch. 12, first footnote*). Anyone somewhat familiar with Talmud study immediately understands the connotation conveyed by a reference to the three *Bava's*: Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia and Bava Basra. Each of these individually, and all three collectively, comprise a body of intricate legal law known both for its volume and complexity. True mastery of this material requires years of intense and diligent study. Yet, one Shabbos, we go to *shul* and listen to the public Torah reading of Parshas Mishpatim. There, within the course of a few minutes, we hear the *pesukim* that are the foundation of basically all of the aforementioned material! During parshas Ki Seitzei, the reader chants the section beginning with “*Ki yikach ish ishah*” (When a man takes a woman) (*Devarim 24:1*). After four verses, he has covered what is for the most part the entire biblical basis of another two great and weighty tractates – Gittin and Kiddushin (dealing with divorce and marriage).

Let us bear in mind that it is not only overt ritual law, but all areas of knowledge, that are contained in the Torah, also often from relatively short passages. The Chofetz Chaim goes on to demonstrate how a great part of the discipline of astronomy is rooted in the study of *kiddush hachodesh* (sanctification of the new moon, including the intricacies of intercalation), surgical/anatomical principles emerge from a Mishnah in Ohalos (*end of chapter 1*), geometry and complex mathematical measuring is contained in Maseches Kilayim (*chapters 3, 5*), etc.

#### Celestial Blueprint

It is in the context of this discussion that we now turn our focus to the current *parshiyos*. In light of the above, the *parshiyos* of Vayakhel and Pekudei, at first glance, seem all the more perplexing. As we have seen, the Torah put a great premium on space, in that huge mountains of wisdom are contained within extremely small samplings of the sacred text – “mountains leaning on a hairsbreadth.” Parshas Terumah and Parshas Tetzaveh record, in significant detail, the instructions to fashion the Sanctuary and its implements, as well as the priestly garments (respectively). Seemingly, the Torah could have appended two words to these sections: – וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן – (and they did so), and that would be that. Instead, however, the Torah devotes two entire *parshiyos* recounting – individually and at length – how each of the instructions was carried out: “And they made the curtains... thirty-one cubits long... fifty loops on the edge... and they made the boards... and Betzalel made the Ark... the Menorah... they made the Breastplate... with gold, blue, purple... the robe... etc. How can we account for what appears as a major departure from the usual pattern of funneling maximum data into minimal text?

The truth is that the Torah is really filled with boundless wisdom, including a store of breathtaking, timeless secrets. For example, the Vilna Gaon states that every single moment of the lives and history of every single living creature and inanimate object is contained within the Torah’s words; if one was able to plumb its depths, one could uncover the details of every single moment of one’s (or anyone or anything else’s) life (*Peirush HaGra L’Safr D’Tzniusa*).

Of course, the somewhat lengthy descriptions of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Priestly Garments likewise contain this aspect, wherein the loftiest and most cherished Torah secrets lay within the sacred words. In a more general sense, R’ Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sichos Mussar, vol. I, §9*) provides us with at least a fractional glimpse of some of the exalted substance reflected in the Mishkan-related *parshiyos*. At the same time, his words serve as a poignant reminder – and a good summary – of what this section is all about.

The Medrash presents a parable, illustrating the “dilemma” that gave rise to the idea of a Mishkan: The king’s only daughter was betrothed to a prince from another land, who wished to return to his kingdom following the marriage. The king related his quandary to the newlywed couple: “I cannot part with my beloved daughter; on the other hand, she is now your wife, and I cannot withhold her from you. So I ask of you this one favor: Take her and go in peace, but please – build a private room for me by your dwelling, so that I may stay by the side of my only daughter.” This is what the Almighty told Yisrael: “I have given you My beloved Torah. I cannot part from Her, but I cannot either withhold Her from you. Build Me a Sanctuary wherein My Presence can reside, so that I may remain with My beloved Torah” (*Shemos Rabbah 33:1*).

This is the essence of the Mishkan – Hashem’s “abode” here on earth. Chazal tell us further that “For whatever Hashem created in the Upper Realms, He created a corresponding entity in the Lower World (of somewhat constricted quality to conform with the limitations of this world)” (*ibid.*, 33:4). The Medrash lists some examples, such as the cherubic figures adorning the Holy Ark, which correspond to the angelic Cherubs that minister in Hashem’s Court.

A wondrous reality emerges from these teachings of Chazal. The numerous details spelled out in this week’s and previous *parshiyos* certainly do not represent a haphazard and redundant dissertation. Rather, this is a blueprint of the Abode of the Almighty Himself.