

Parshas Vayakhel

MECHANICS OF A NATION

After the Golden Calf, Moshe gathers the people for a discourse:

וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אִתְּכֶם – Moses gathered the whole community of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: “These are the things that the Lord commanded to do” (35: 1)

He tells them certain laws of Shabbos, and collection for and initiation of construction of the Mishkan.

This occurred the morning after the Yom Kippur Moshe returned with the second Luchos. It seems likely that his first public appearance upon his return would include a notable message regarding their conduct. Yet he gathered them together to discuss Shabbos and the Mishkan. The Nesivos Shalom notes out how usually, an act, speech or instruction initiate an episode; this is the sole instance where וַיִּקְהַל, getting people together, starts a story.

The Noam Elimelech explains that mitzvos were given to the nation, not individuals. This means that when a person sins, it is an act of rebellion, splintering from the nation, albeit momentarily. Redemption and forgiveness is attained by blending back into the nation. In the same way a harmony is a beautiful sound where no single voice is discernible, a tzibbur, the collective, is safe because an individual does not stand out.

Moshe defended the Jews to God, and argued that the Golden Calf was the act of rogue individuals, not the nation. Sin is an individual act – how could the nation be held accountable, regardless of how many had indeed sinned?

On his return, he saw to it that what he said was indeed true. The nation was whole and not fractured – he united them – וַיִּקְהַל. This makes וַיִּקְהַל unique as an opening.

The Nesivos Shalom proves this from what Moshe told them. He said of the laws that לַעֲשׂוֹת אִתְּכֶם – but the instructions for Shabbos that he mentions are to not light fire, and to not work. How is not doing something called לַעֲשׂוֹת – to do?

Perhaps the instruction wasn't discussing Shabbos at all; having conceded to Moshe's argument, he received the instruction לַעֲשׂוֹת אִתְּכֶם – to make them, the Jews, into a united nation once again – וַיִּקְהַל. Moshe was told to back up his claim!

This concept recurs over and over. When the spies were sent, the nation could not be absolved. They were sent in the capacity of the people's representatives, and the generation died out. The Purim rescue occurred once the

divided nation fought stood as one לְהִקָּהֵל וְלַעֲמֹד עַל-נַפְשָׁם. Korach's error was not believing that the nation was more potent than the individual, claiming כֹּלָם קְדוּשִׁים.

Not to say that the laws Moshe spoke about were incidental to the purpose of gathering them. Far from it. They were chosen as both are incumbent on the nation, serving the same function, in contrast to more personal mitzvos,

The Midrash says that Hashem said to Shabbos that כְּנִסְתּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל is its pre-ordained. כְּנִסְתּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל is the Jewish national identity and consciousness, the supersoul of the nation. Shabbos observance is not down to the individual alone – it requires everyone's input. Shabbos intrinsically unites Jews.

The Mishkan was selected for the discourse for the same reason. Everyone was required to make donation, buying a small stake in it. Covering the project costs with a few individual sponsors would not have served it's purpose.

Both demonstrate the potency of a group over an individual. The parts in a machine are unremarkable – but together they achieve complex and sophisticated goals. Note how many mitzvos require groups to be adequately performed. The Nesivos Shalom says that we refer to Hashem as אֲבִינוּ – our father – conceptually, obviously. If we identify with the nation, we can say אֲבִינוּ.

We say in the Amida every day: בְּרַכְנוּ אֲבִינוּ כֹּלְנוּ כְּאֶחָד בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ – when everyone gets along, we can proudly say אֲבִינוּ.

BENEFITING FROM MIRACLES

R' Chaim Brisker wonders how the jug of oil the Hasmoneans found in the Chanukah story was suitable for use beyond the first day. It wasn't natural olive oil after the first day – it was the product of miracle, and therefore not organic – and the commandment to light the Menorah was with natural olive oil specifically. It might have had the physical and chemical properties of olive oil, but the substance had not come from an olive!

What was the point of using it after the first day?

Secondly, the Gemara in Taanis 24 states that one ought not benefit from a miracle.

Examples of this may be found in the stories of rabbis of old in Europe who didn't have food, and when circumstance or luck provided something for them to eat, the Rabbi would refuse it on the grounds that it would detract from his Olam Habah.

At the construction of the Mishkan, in Shemos 35: 27, the Torah describes how the princes, הַנְּשִׂאִים, brought oil and spices after the nation donated resources, but הַנְּשִׂאִים is spelled without the letter י. Rashi explains the oversight to mean that their intentions were good, but their actions were deficient, in that they underestimated the will of the Jewish people to donate materials for the construction of the Mishkan, and so their name was shortened here to teach us to act wholeheartedly.

R' Yonasan ben Uziel explains differently, reading Nesi'im as Neshaim, Aramaic for clouds. It was not the Nesi'im who provided the materials, but rather, clouds came to the princes with stones, oil and spices – from the sky!

R' Chaim Zevin asks R' Chaim Brisker's question; how could the princes use these for the Mishkan? They might have physically been olive oil/stones/spices, but again, they were unnatural. And then there is the prohibition of

benefiting from miracles.

This can be answered by understanding how Noach left the Ark.

וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לָעֵת עֶרֶב, וְהָיָה עֲלֶיהָ-זֵית טָרֵף בְּפִיהָ (8: 11)

The Ramban explains that the olive branch was from Gan Eden – clearly, it is an actual place with actual things within it.

Knowing this, R' Tzvi Pesach Franck concludes that we can differentiate between certain kinds of miracles. The cases under discussion were not Yesh Me'ayin – something from nothing. These were Yesh MeYesh, manipulations of something that was somewhere else – specifically, in Heaven! They were then moved to Earth. They were thus completely permissible, much like the Manna, which was not a new “thing”, rather, it is what the angels grind to make their bread according to the Gemara in Yoma. Nothing new was created, which was what the prohibition in Taanis was referring to. That is to say that the miracle was not their creation, which one would be forbidden to benefit from according to Taanis 24, but rather, their miraculous manipulation to be somewhere else at the appropriate time.

This can be proven from when Yakov brings a feast to his father, Yitzchak:

“וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲגִשָּׁה לִי וְאֶכְלָה מִצִּיד בְּנִי-לְמַעַן תִּבְרַכְדָּ, נַפְשִׁי; וַיִּגֹּשׁ-לוֹ, וַיֹּאכַל, וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן, וַיִּשְׂתֶּה.” – “And he said: ‘Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s venison, that my soul may bless thee.’ And he brought it near to him, and he did eat; and he brought him wine, and he drank.”

At no point did his mother prepare wine, and R' Yonason ben Uziel again points out the previous idea of things existing in Heaven and says that an angel brought wine made from grapes that were in heaven since Creation.

There is a saying; “To bake an apple pie from scratch, you must first create the Universe,” – this is the same idea. The objects under discussion were not from scratch at all. (edit)

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