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**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS VAYAKHEL-
PIKUDEI**

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS
VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who,
more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us
for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 1. GATHERING WITHIN GATHERING**
- 2. FIRST “DOUBLEHEADER”**
- 3. THE MISHKAN-DEJÀ VU**
- 4. SWEET LIGHT**
- 5. FOSSIL FUEL” FOR THE SANCTUARY**
- 6. SELF-TRANSCENDENCE**
- 7. BETZALEL’S PASSION**
- 8. SHABBOS, SHABBOS**
- 9. HERE WE GO AGAIN!**
- 10. PUT OUT THE FIRES!**
- 11. SHABBOS AND THE MISHKAN: PATENT PROTECTED**
- 12. THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE**
- 13. THE PREEMINENCE OF WOMEN**
- 14. SMOKE ALARM**
- 15. JEWISH PYROTECHNICS**
- 16. WHEN COUNTING COUNTS**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

17. THE COMPLETED BAIS HAMIKDASH

18. PRIME SUSPECT!

19. THE STATE OF OUR UNION IS STRONG!

20. COMPLETING THE TASK

21. MOSES THE CPA

22. THE NEW WORLD ORDER

23. IN YOUR FACE JUDAISM

24. THE SECOND MISHKAN

25. WHOSE BUILDING IS IT?

26. VOLUNTARY COMMANDMENTS

27. TELESCOPE AND MICROSCOPE

28. THE REAL COMPLETION

29. THE END!

30. HALF TO THE VERY END

EPILOGUE

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Vayakhel-Pikudei* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha *Vayakhel-Pikudei* are closely connected to the Final Redemption.

Vayakhel means “and he gathered,” where Moses assembled the entire Jewish people. This is precisely what will happen in the future Redemption, as it says, “A great *Kahal*-assemblage will come here.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The root of the word Pikudei is the same as the word G-d used to redeem the Jews from Egypt: "*Pakod Pokadti*"-I have remembered."

May we see, imminently, G-d's remembrance of us and take us out of Galus and bring us to the great assemblage of all Jews in the Bais Hamikdash!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY ONE

**GATHERING WITHIN
GATHERING**

**Construction of the Sanctuary does not
override the Shabbos because one cannot
build in the realm of holiness at the expense
of compromising holiness.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY ONE

GATHERING WITHIN GATHERING

The General Assembly

In the earlier parsha of Terumah, G-d gave Moses instructions concerning the contributions for and the construction of the Mishkan. In this week's parsha Moses gathered the Jewish people and gave them those instructions. But before doing so he instructed them concerning the Shabbos:

“These are the things that G-d commanded, to do them: On six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you...”

Several questions arise:

First, this parsha is unique in that it is the only one in which it is said that “Moses assembled the entire assembly of the children of Israel. Why in this parsha particularly?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Second, why was it necessary for Moses to gather all of the people? He could have easily spoken to the elders and they would have passed along the instructions concerning construction of the Mishkan to the people.

Third, the Torah uses the words,

“These are the things that G-d commanded, **to do** them,”

which signals that the commandment which follows is one of action. The problem here is that it concerns **resting** on the Shabbos, which is passive, not active.

The Midrash (Yalkut) in commenting on the first verse seems to have anticipated these questions and offers an insight that provides an answer to them:

The Midrash states,

“Moses gathered the people on Shabbos specifically for the purpose of engaging in Torah study, and he instituted this practice for all of Israel, for each and every Shabbos.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In other words, Moses' purpose in gathering them here is to instruct them about the importance of observing Shabbos not just by desisting from work but also **pro-actively**, by gathering the Jews for the purpose of Torah study, specifically on Shabbos.

The question still remains, why was this message about communal Torah study on Shabbos mentioned here in our parsha, the subject of which is primarily the Mishkan. The topic of Shabbos arises tangentially here.

[Rashi explains that the Torah's juxtaposition of Shabbos and the building of the Mishkan was intended to teach the people that one must not desecrate the Shabbos, even for construction of the Mishkan.]

Why Doesn't Erecting the Mishkan Override the Shabbos?

To answer this question we must understand why building G-d's sanctuary does not override the Shabbos. After all, the Mishkan was where G-d chose to rest His presence. Moreover, His willingness to dwell amongst

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the Jewish people through the Mishkan demonstrated that He had forgiven them for the sin of the Golden Calf. Why then should its construction not override the Shabbos?

Furthermore, why is it that the people were permitted, nay commanded, to offer sacrifices in the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash-Holy Temple, on Shabbos, which involved the seeming transgression of several of the prohibitions of Shabbos, such as slaughtering the animal and burning it on the Altar's fire? Why is it that the sacrifices could override the Shabbos, but the construction of the Mishkan, which facilitated the sacrifices, could not?

Inauguration of Integrity

One answer is that there is a difference between creating and inaugurating a holy institution and what we may do in it once it is established. To insure the spiritual integrity of the Sanctuary there could not be even an apparent compromise of Jewish law while it

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

is being built. We cannot initiate something G-dly with compromised standards.

Once the structure was complete with all of its spiritual components, it could “tolerate” and even “incorporate” the sacrifices on Shabbos. Then, within the confines of the Sanctuary only, the sacrifices were able to become part of its Shabbos observance.

[We must make it abundantly clear, however, that the above is not a license for **us** to decide what activities we want to do on Shabbos based on what we may think will enhance the Shabbos experience. That decision has to be made by G-d, as He expresses His will in the Torah. And the Torah clearly permits and even requires sacrifices to be offered on Shabbos; but only certain obligatory sacrifices and only in the Sanctuary, exclusively.]

Positive versus Negative Commandments

One might suggest yet another explanation to distinguish between the creation of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Mishkan and the offering of sacrifices after its completion.

Whenever there are conflicting Mitzvos, we must make a determination which one takes precedence over the other.

Generally the rule is that when a positive Mitzvah conflicts with a negative Mitzvah, the positive overrides the negative. The classic example of this is a *talis* made of linen. As far as Biblical status is concerned, we are permitted to insert woolen *tzitzis*-fringes in it to fulfill the Mitzvah of wearing a *talis* with *tzitzis* even though the Torah proscribes *shatnez*-a garment with a mixture of wool and linen. The positive Mitzvah of wearing *tzitzis* overrides the negative commandment of not wearing wool and linen.

The rationale for this is provided by the Alter Rebbe (in his classic work the Tanya; *Iggeres Hateshuvah*, chapter one), as elucidated by the Rebbe:

If we were to choose to refrain from doing the positive Mitzvah because of the possible

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

transgression, we would be left without the light generated by the Mitzvah. Failure to do a Mitzvah, even due to extenuating circumstances, will not generate G-dly energy. Our world would be diminished by that lacuna.

On the other hand, if we conclude that the positive Mitzvah takes precedence, there would be no damage caused by the negative transgression because the Torah mandates that we allow the positive to override it. Doing the negative (i.e., wearing wool mixed with linen) in this situation does not contravene G-d's will; it will not cause damage and the positive Mitzvah will succeed in bringing G-dly light.

Hence, when the two converge, the positive Mitzvah has an advantage over a negative Mitzvah.

Similarly, if we allow Shabbos to override the sacrifices, we would miss the powerful light that these sacrifices generate. When the Torah permits these sacrifices on Shabbos it is not considered a violation of the Shabbos

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

prohibitions since it is done with explicit Divine sanction.

In addition to Shabbos observance by desisting from work, Shabbos also requires positive actions, such as remembering the Shabbos by declaring the holiness of Shabbos in the Kiddush prayer. However, that does not conflict with the sacrifices. There is ample time to do both. Furthermore, Kiddush is recited at night and the sacrifices were offered during the day. Likewise the obligation to gather on Shabbos to study Torah does not conflict with the sacrifices; there was ample time to offer sacrifices, gather the Jews and study Torah with them. In effect there is no real conflict between sacrifices and the Shabbos observance.

However, the Mitzvah to build the Mishkan was a constant one; they could not rest until it was completed. If the people had to build it on Shabbos there would have been an irreconcilable conflict between building the Mishkan and gathering to study Torah, both of which are positive Mitzvos.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Thus, construction of the Mishkan would have undermined the positive act of communal Torah study. There was no basis to permit one at the expense of the other.

We can now understand why Moses taught about gathering the community for Torah study on Shabbos before hinting that the construction of the Mishkan does not override the Shabbos. By introducing us to the all-encompassing positive activity of communal Torah study on Shabbos, we can understand why that Mitzvah overrode the construction of the Mishkan. It is because Shabbos has a positive activity that cannot be overridden by the other positive activity, construction of the Mishkan.

We must still understand why studying Torah on Shabbos overrides such an important Mitzvah as building a Sanctuary for G-d? After all they are both positive exercises. Why would one be more important than the other?

The Four Cubits of Halachah

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

One answer is that Torah study itself creates a Sanctuary. The Talmud states that “from the time the Temple was destroyed, G-d only has the four cubits of Halachah in His world.” This means that Torah study, particularly when done publically, takes the place of the Bais Hamikdash.

During the weekdays most people are busy earning a living. They can therefore only fulfill the mitzvah of Torah study intermittently (a chapter in the morning and a chapter in the evening). We cannot therefore rely on Torah study to serve in the place of the Bais Hamikdash on weekdays. But Shabbos is different. By having communal Torah study it **can** take the place of the Bais Hamikdash. We may therefore not override the Shabbos to build the Mishkan because we would miss the positive parallel energy of Torah study.

The teaching about public sessions of Torah learning on Shabbos is reinforced this year in particular. This year is known as the year of Hakhel, the year of gathering. In the days of the Temple, Jews would gather there to hear

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the words of Torah read by the king. Even though we no longer have the Bais Hamikdash, the Rebbe nevertheless encouraged us to find opportunities to gather groups of Jews for the purpose of Torah study.

This message is even more pronounced this week of *Vayakhel*, in the year of *Hakhel*, by reading of the construction of the Mishkan. All forms of assembly will come together imminently with the Final Redemption at which time the prophet declares; “A great assemblage-*Kahal* shall come here.”

If Torah study takes precedence over the construction of the Bais Hamikdash because it actually takes its place, how much more so when the Torah subjects we study relate to the Bais Hamikdash itself.

There is, however, a way to have our proverbial cake and eat it. Rashi's commentary on the Talmud cites a Midrashic tradition that the future Bais Hamikdash will actually descend pre-fabricated from heaven.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

And that, Rashi says, can even happen on Shabbos or a Jewish Holiday.

In that scenario we can devote ourselves to communal Torah study and see the building of the Bais Hamikdash as well.

ESSAY TWO

FIRST

“DOUBLEHEADER”

The first two Torah portions reflect the two pronged thrust of Torah.

We must see the community through the prism of the individual and the individual through the prism of the community.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWO

FIRST “DOUBLEHEADER”

The paradox

Spring training cannot be too far away when we read the Torah’s first “doubleheader”, this week’s combined Torah portion: “*Vayakheil-Pikudei*!”

In a more serious vein, this double parsha is the first of seven combined Torah readings.

Each Torah portion has its own unique lesson that it conveys. A combined reading contains not two independent messages, but a message in which each of the two separate themes complement one another.

The Message of Community

Vayakheil – which means ‘And he gathered’—refers to Moses’ return from Mount Sinai upon receiving the second set of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

tablets. On the very next day, Moses gathered all of the Jewish people to give them G-d's instructions concerning the building of the *Mishkan*-Sanctuary in the desert. This structure was to be G-d's way of expressing His desire to have a relationship with the Jewish people, not just with some elite individuals.

The message of *Vayakheil* is thus the message of community. *Vayakheil* underscores the importance of Jewish unity to facilitate G-d's dwelling in our midst.

Detailed Accounting

Pikudei, on the other hand, refers to the detailed accounting Moses made of all the components of the Sanctuary. This reflects Judaism's emphasis on the need for every detail to be properly preserved. Every ounce of gold, silver and copper was to be accounted for.

These two themes appear mutually exclusive. How can we simultaneously put aside our individuality to form a collective identity, a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

holy nation, while being obsessed with detail and nuance? Are these two ideals not impossible to combine?

To be sure, it is not inconceivable for a person to alternate between dedication to a community and focus on the individual. But to combine both characteristics—as the double nature of the Torah reading suggests—seems to be a rather elusive goal.

See the Nation through the Eyes of the Individual and the Individual through the Eyes of the Nation

A journalist and communal activist wrote of his experience with the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*. When he had a private audience with the Rebbe, the Rebbe after responding to his private needs, would use the opportunity to channel the discussion into a communal area. And, conversely, when he attended a public gathering, where the Rebbe addressed thousands about communal, national and international concerns, he was struck by the way in which the Rebbe, during a brief break

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

between six hours of discourse, expressed interest and concern for some personal matter that affected this journalist.

The journalist was impressed with the Rebbe's ability to see the nation through the eyes of the individual and to see the individual through the eyes of the nation—*Vayakheil and Pikudei*.

Focusing on both messages to bring Moshiach

As we approach the month of *Nissan*, the month of Redemption, when the Jewish people emerged from Egypt as a nation, we have to focus on both messages: the message of community and the message of individuality. For, it is the combination of these two features that forged our nation.

And as we stand now on the threshold of the final Redemption, and our nation's identity will be completed, we must take the paradoxical message of community within individuality and individuality within community, even more seriously. This year—

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

with the combined sections of *Vayakhel* and *Pikudei*—the message of combining the two themes of community and individuality is all the more poignant.

Spring Training

Translated into practical terms, the following suggestion can be made. When we get together for a community function, we should not allow individual concerns to be swept under the carpet. Likewise, when we focus our attention on an individual we have to find ways for this private matter to serve and help the entire community.

This is our version of “spring training,” the way we prepare for the Spring Festival of Passover—as well as the imminent future Redemption of the Jewish people.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY THREE
THE MISHKAN-DÉJÀ
VU

The construction of the Sanctuary is G-d's way of
expressing His love for us and that He wants to live with
us.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY THREE

THE MISHKAN-DÉJÀ VU

Repetition, Repetition!

When we begin reading this week's Torah portion, with its detailed description of the building of the Mishkan, we think that we are having the experience of *déjà vu*. Didn't we read about the construction of the Mishkan just a few weeks ago in the Torah portion of *Terumah*?

Would this have been any other book, one could have excused the repetition of these details. But, the Torah, as a book of **Divine** instruction, does not contain any superfluous language. Even one apparently redundant word or letter is often scrutinized by the Talmud for its meaning.

How do we then explain the phenomenon of this week's *parsha Vayakhel* that features the repetition of several dozen verses that

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

describe the minutest details concerning the construction of the Mishkan?

Another Example of Repetition

This is not the first time this anomaly occurs in the Torah. In at least one other place before, the Torah repeats an incident several times. By reflecting on the reason for the repetition there, we can shed light on the anomaly of this week's narrative.

In the Book of Genesis, the Torah relates how Eliezer the servant of Abraham was sent to Abraham's birthplace to find a wife for Isaac. The Torah recounts in detail how Eliezer met Rebecca and how he tested her. Subsequent to that the Torah recounts once more how Eliezer repeated the entire episode to Rebecca's father and brother.

Here too, our Sages raise the obvious question, why would the Torah that is dedicated to teaching us how to properly live our lives spend so much time on this entire episode? Why is it so important for us to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

know what Eliezer—the servant of Abraham—said and repeated?

Our Sages answer,

“The talk of the servants of the Patriarchs is more precious than the [legal] teachings of the children.”

By repeating the narrative concerning Abraham’s servant the Torah underscores the high esteem and love that G-d has for the Patriarchs whose dedication to Him paved the way for the selection of the Jewish People.

Thus, our sages’ perspective is that repetition of a story concerning an individual or subject in the Torah is G-d’s way of highlighting the affection He has for that particular individual or subject.

Repetition: A sign of affection

What has been said about the Patriarchs can also been said about the Mishkan. G-d’s instruction to the Jewish People to build the Mishkan was His way of declaring to them “I

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

desire to dwell in your midst. And despite your involvement in the construction and worship of the Golden Calf, I have forgiven you and I cherish the opportunity to live with you.”

When the Torah recounts how the Jewish people were told of and fulfilled the Mitzvah to build the Mishkan, it was the Jewish People’s way of responding to G-d and declaring: “We cherish the opportunity to be able to create a structure that will bring Your presence into our lives.”

Both the instruction to build the Mishkan and the compliance of the Jewish People with this command were dramatic expressions of the reciprocal love and commitment between G-d and His people. In a loving relationship every word and every expression of that love is to be savored and repeated over and over.

Most recurrent theme in our prayers

If repetition is a sign of importance and beloved-ness, one need only survey our daily prayers to see which issue is the most central

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

and beloved in the eyes of our Sages (the Divinely inspired authors of our *Siddur*-Prayerbook).

The one theme that stands out as being the most pervasive, the most often repeated in the *Siddur*, is Moshiach and the future Redemption. It is such a recurring theme in all three daily prayers that, in the course of a single year, reference is made to it, and allied subjects such as the building of the Bais Hamikdash, Resurrection of the Dead, etc., over 20,000 times!

Moshiach's coming will not only herald an age of peace and prosperity, it is the age when the "love affair" between G-d and the Jewish people, will be clearly manifested. It will be the time when G-d/the Jewish People will once more build a Sanctuary—but, this time, a permanent one—in Jerusalem, as His/our way of declaring our boundless love and commitment to each other.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FOUR

SWEET LIGHT

**Judaism is multi-colored and sweet. Judaism
is both rational and mystical.**

**Judaism is warm and inviting as well as firm
and demanding.**

**All of this was radiated through the light of
the Menorah that reflected the entire
spectrum of Torah hues and lights and
radiated that light to the entire world..**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FOUR

SWEET LIGHT

The Menorah for Lighting

The Menorah (Candelabrum), which existed in the Temple is described in the Torah in several ways. In some instances it is described as “Menorah HaTehorah (the pure Menorah) because it had to be made of pure gold.

In this week’s parsha, where the Torah recounts how Moses delivered G-d’s commandment to build the Mishkan and all of its vessels, the Torah introduces the Menorah with a new and unique title: “*Menoras HaMaor* (The Menorah for lighting).

Several questions can be raised here.

First, why does the Torah add the words “for lighting?” Wasn’t it obvious that the Menorah was intended for lighting?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Second, there is only one other place (Numbers 4:9) in the Torah where the Menorah is characterized as “the Menorah for lighting.” If the characterization of the Menorah as a Menorah for light is so crucial for our understanding of the Menorah, why is this description not mentioned in virtually every other place where the Menorah is mentioned?

Third, in our parsha, all the other utensils of the Mishkan are mentioned, but are presented without their function. The ark and table are mentioned without adding, “The Ark for the Tablets,” or “The Table for the Showbread.” Only the altars are described as the Altar of the Burnt Offering and the Altar of Incense, in order to distinguish one from the other. Why then is the Menorah singled out here to be described as “the Menorah for lighting?”

Moses Communication

The key to answering these questions is to understand what distinguishes the mention

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

of the Mishkan and its vessels in this parsha from other references. In this parsha, Moses, for the first time, transmitted the commandment to make the Mishkan and its vessels to the Jewish people. All other references to the Mishkan and its contents are either G-d's communication to Moses, or the way the Mishkan was actually built.

It follows then, that while it was not so crucial for G-d to have told Moses that the Menorah was for lighting, it was imperative that it be articulated unambiguously to the Jewish people.

The Menorah's Primary Function

A Menorah—particularly one made out of pure gold—is an exquisite piece of art. The Menorah was clearly the most ornate piece in the Mishkan. It had seven branches, numerous decorative cups, spheres and flowers. The fact that it was made out of one piece of pure gold only enhanced its aesthetic and monetary value. The value of the Menorah was further increased when we

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

consider the Midrashic tradition that Moses was incapable of making the Menorah, and G-d told him throw the gold into the fire, and out came a completed Menorah.

All of these facts would seem to indicate that the Menorah's primary role was not as a source of light, but as an exquisite expression of Divine artistry. To further buttress the argument that the Menorah was a piece of Divine art, one can cite the Kabbalistic understanding of the seven branches of the Menorah as a representation of the seven Divine attributes.

One could easily conclude that the placement of the Menorah in the Temple was intended to give people an opportunity to glimpse the Divine, by beholding the unparalleled beauty of the Menorah.

To dismiss this thought, that might have entered the minds of the Jews when they first heard about the Menorah and its intricate design, the Torah goes out of its way to stress that the Menorah was primarily for lighting. Its main function was not to be a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

spiritual museum piece for people to marvel at and even be inspired by, but to bring G-d's light to the world.

Indeed, of the miracles that occurred on a daily basis for the entire duration of the first Temple was the *Ner HaMa'aravi* (The Western Light) that would never extinguish on its own. From this Western Light, the Kohain would kindle the other lights. This miraculous light, the Talmud states, served as testimony of G-d's presence in Israel.

Every Jew a Western/Colorful/Sweet Light

Every Jew is commissioned to serve as a "Western light" that never extinguishes, and brings the awareness of G-d's presence to the world.

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, one of the great Chassidic Masters (whose yahrtzeit was observed recently on the 21st of Adar) explains how the word *ma'aravi* (Western) can also be translated as the "light that is made of multiple hues." In addition, Rabbi Elimelech writes, it can be translated as "the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

sweet light.”

The lesson for our times is clear.

As we are going through the last vestiges of evil before the dawn of the Messianic Age it is not sufficient for us to be models of spiritual beauty, or spiritual museum artifacts. We must serve as beacons of light to dispel the darkness around us.

Judaism is not a bland religion; it is multifaceted and sweet. It contains intellectual, emotional as well as practical components. Judaism is both rational and mystical. Judaism is warm and inviting as well as firm and demanding. And when we light up the world with the light of the Menorah it should reflect all of these shades. We must become the non-extinguishable “western lights” that reflect the entire spectrum of Torah hues and lights.

But there is one more condition. The light must be sweet. It must not only reflect the sweetness of Torah knowledge and practice itself, but, moreover, it must be presented in a sweet and pleasant way.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

By becoming the Menorah for lighting, we will hasten the coming of Moshiach, the ultimate leader and *Ner HaMa'aravi*, who will bring the full spectrum of Divine light into the world, in the spirit of true peace.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FIVE

**“FOSSIL FUEL” FOR
THE SANCTUARY**

The Mishkan and subsequent Holy Temples
correspond to the human body.

The holiness from the three divisions of the
Sanctuary would flow through the human
body.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FIVE

“FOSSIL FUEL” FOR THE SANCTUARY

Mishkan=Human Body=Mitzvos

According to the Zohar, the Mishkan, the portable Temple the Jews built in the desert—the completion of which we read about in this week’s parsha—corresponded to the human body. Our Sages also tell us that the human body corresponds to the Commandments of the Torah. The equation this yields is: Mishkan=body=Mitzvos.

Translating this “mathematical” formula into simple English, it suggests that when a Jew uses his or her body to fulfill the Mitzvos, that body becomes a Sanctuary for G-d.

All Components

One can take the parallel even further. The Mishkan consisted of many parts. Yet its

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

basic structure, as was the basic structure of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem that was modeled after the Mishkan, comprised three sections the:

- (a) Outer courtyard;
- (b) Sanctuary itself, and the
- (c) Holy of Holies, or the inner sanctum that was separated from the Sanctuary by a curtain.

If we take the Zohar's association of the human body to the Mishkan, we must say that the human being also consists of three main parts. They are the:

- (a) Base physical aspects of the body, which includes the digestive systems, the breathing apparatus, the sexual organs, etc.
- (b) Emotional faculties, associated with the heart and the
- (c) Intellectual faculties associated with the brain.

The obvious message from the above is that to make a Sanctuary for G-d one must involve all components of the human being.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Three Stages of Human Life

According to some commentators the three sections of the Mishkan can also be said to correspond to three stages of the human being's life: Youth, middle age and old age.

It may be suggested that these three stages correspond to the three components of the human body.

(a) During one's youth, the more physical, hormonal and sensual components of the person are active.

(b) During middle-age a person develops a sense of who he truly loves, the emotions become more refined.

(c) In one's later years, one's pursuit of intellectual goals is not overshadowed by the physical and emotional interests that are more dominant in the earlier two stages of life.

Once again, the obvious lesson from the parallel of the three stages of life to the three components of the Mishkan, is that every stage of life must be utilized for the goal of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

making a Mishkan, within one's life, and particularly, within one's area of strength.

In one's youth, one should try to channel youthful passion and energy into Mitzvos, middle age depth of emotion should be utilized for cultivating a love for G-d and everything G-dly.

Old-age, should not be squandered on golf courses, tennis courts, casinos, etc., beyond, of course, the needed recreation for health, but on deepening one's understanding of Judaism. And, indeed, in recent years, we've seen an explosion of participation of senior citizens in Jewish educational programs.

Space, Time and Energy

On a still deeper level, the ancient Kabbalistic work, *Sefer Yetzirah*, teaches that all of existence consists of *olam* (world or space), *shanah* (year or time), and *nefesh* (soul or energy). So far, we've explained how the space of the human body consists of three parts: lower body, heart and brain. Likewise, human time also can be divided into the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

three stages of youth, middle age and old age. One can also find three aspects of energy within the human being, each one corresponding to a different part of the Mishkan.

(a) On the lowest level, we have a soul that animates our body and enables us to function on a basic level. This part of the soul is responsible for all of our physical, emotional, intellectual and even spiritual identities and endeavors.

(b) But there is a deeper part of our being, the sub-conscious, hidden part of our personality that we are frequently not even aware that we possess. And while we may have created a Sanctuary for G-d by investing our conscious faculties and energies into serving G-d, we may still have a spiritual vacuum beneath the surface. One must invest time and effort to dig deeper within our souls to find and utilize our subconscious energies for good.

Indeed, many of the commandments we were commanded to do are “spiritual-drills” that

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

can excavate the sub-conscious spiritual terrain of our soul, clean it and harness the spiritual “fossil-fuel” we can tap into for the creation of a Sanctuary.

(c) But there is also a deeper level of our soul, its very essence. This essence eludes discovery even when we dig within our soul to find its subconscious nature.

On special occasions, however, such as at the end of Yom Kippur, while dancing on Simchas Torah, during the festivities of Purim, on the last day of Passover, or in a deep crisis situation, this essence comes to the fore.

Three Temples

The Jewish people built two Temples in Jerusalem and the third will be built imminently by Moshiach. Chassidic literature expounds on the differences between each of these sanctuaries.

In light of the above analysis it may be suggested that the:

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

- (a) First Temple made a Sanctuary out of the conscious spiritual levels of our soul.
- (b) Second Temple (where the Ark with the Tablets it contained was hidden in a subterranean chamber) paralleled the Sanctuary we build within the subconscious inner dimensions of our soul. However, the
- (c) Third Temple will enable us to create a sanctuary out of all our soul's dimensions, including its very essence.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SIX

SELF- TRANSCENDENCE

To construct a Mishkan-Sanctuary for G-d,
we have to first discover within ourselves a
Divine spirit of selflessness and unity.

The Sanctuary, once constructed, would help
us in our self-discovery

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SIX

SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

A Gathering versus a Community

This week's *parsha*, *Vayakhel*, features Moses' instructions to the Jewish people concerning the building of the Mishkan (the portable sanctuary) they would build in the desert. To transmit these instructions, the Torah informs us Moses gathered the entire Jewish people. Hence the title *Vayakhel*, which means "And he gathered."

The term *Vayakhel*, however, actually, conveys a deeper meaning than just a gathering of a large number of people in one location. A *kahal*, is a community, a cohesive group of individuals who cease to be recognized as individuals because they have become one organic whole. Before Moses would teach them about the building of a Temple for G-d, he had to transform their

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

status into that of a Kahal.

The question thus arises: Why couldn't the Torah just have stated that Moses gathered the Jews and commanded them concerning the construction of the Mishkan. True, he wanted all of them to hear that they were all expected to contribute towards this effort, it did not seem necessary for this objective to have them coalesce into one communal entity. What harm could there have been to the Mishkan project if they were to have retained their status as individuals?

The Objective in Building a Mishkan

To answer this question it is necessary for us to understand the objective of building the Mishkan. G-d, obviously, does not need a physical location for Himself. Nor does He want us to simply make a symbolic gesture of our devotion to Him by building a structure that is dedicated to serving Him. What then was the purpose of building the Mishkan as well as subsequent Temples in Jerusalem?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

What G-d wants of us, we are told by the Torah, is to search for, discover and harness the Divine energy that exists within creation, for the purpose of ultimately revealing the Divine essence of **everything** that exists. To accomplish this task we were told to build a Sanctuary, a physical location that would express that G-dly essence in a way that eludes the rest of existence.

The ultimate goal, however, was to extend this expression of holiness to every part of the world. In the Torah's very own words, "You shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in **them**." The purpose was not just so that G-d can dwell in **it**. Through the Sanctuary the Divine essence can later be revealed in all of creation.

Reflecting Divine Selflessness and Unity

In order for us humans to accomplish this task of revealing the Divine in everything by way of constructing a Mishkan, we had to first reveal the Divine essence within ourselves. Our approach to building the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Mishkan had to reflect a Divine attitude of selflessness and unity, two of the characteristics we associate only with the Divine. Humans, left to their own devices, will be self-centered. As such there cannot really be true unity and cohesiveness; because each individual's self-oriented life will conflict with somebody else's selfish interests.

However, because we also possess a Divine soul, humans are capable of finding the Divine element within that allows them to transcend their own existence and to be utterly selfless. And as a consequence, we all have the capacity to merge our own identities with those of the rest of the community, to the point where we become one. In the process of the construction of the Mishkan, thus, it was crucial for them to strip themselves of their selfish, individualistic natures and expose their collective and transcendent Divine nature.

Human nature makes it hard for an individual to part with his or her possessions. Even when one does so, he will try to retain some measure of authority over that object.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

For example, if one were to give a car to another person, he will feel compelled to give friendly advice to its new owner as to how they should treat the car. If something were to happen to the car, he would feel worse than if it was never theirs.

Had the Jewish people been asked to contribute to the Mishkan effort merely as individuals, they would have felt that they never really gave anything of their own. There would have been no sacrifice—an expression of the Divine within us that allows us to transcend self—in the act of contributing because they would have always felt that they had not really relinquished total ownership over that object.

Moreover, by retaining the individual status of their contribution, they would have always felt a sense of identification with that particular component of the Mishkan to which they contributed. All the other parts and functions to which they did not contribute would have not meant the same to them.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Hence the very “project” that was designed to introduce a divine element into nature would have been thwarted by the less-than-Divine attitude that would have been brought to bear on the construction of the Mishkan. Moses had to therefore gather all of the people into one *Kahal*, one indivisible communal entity that would reflect their G-dly nature and would then imbue this G-dly nature into the Miishkan.

Preparing for Moshiach by Rising Above our Individual Identities

Our preparations for the imminent Messianic Era require no less of an effort to maximize our G-dly talents than that which was needed when they built the Mishkan. While, as humans, we cannot—nor should we—relinquish our individualistic talents and identities—there is a need for us to also reveal that G-dly capacity to rise above our individual identities and to give of ourselves selflessly. In addition, we have to be able to see ourselves as indivisible parts of the entire

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

Jewish people and of humanity at large, as a way pf preparing for the ultimate Redemption, a time that is described by the prophet when: “a great assemblage—*kahal*—will return.” May we see the unfolding of this prophecy imminently!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SEVEN

BETZALEL'S PASSION

**Frequently, we have to go back a generation
or more to explain the source of our
empowerment.**

**Parents, grandparents and other ancestors
bequeath to us a legacy of holiness.**

**Betzalel inherited his obsession with holiness
from his obscure grandfather, Chur.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SEVEN

BETZALEL'S PASSION

Who Constructed the Ark?

Throughout this week's parsha the Torah records all that had been done to construct the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary in the desert. And repeatedly the Torah states: "and he made...", without specifying who made that particular part of the Mishkan. This lack of specificity leads us to the conclusion that it refers to the Mishkan's main architect, Betzalel. However, the difficulty with this: why is his name mentioned explicitly only in reference to the building of the Ark.

Rashi seems to have anticipated this question when he writes that "Betzalel dedicated himself conscientiously more than the other wise men, it was therefore named after him."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The difficulty that remains is: Why was he more conscientious about the Ark than all the other parts of the Mishkan?

One answer is that the Ark was indeed unique. The Mishkan was built as a dwelling place for G-d and was to be the place where all those who would enter would feel G-d's presence in a palpable way. However, it was the Ark specifically through which G-d communicated to Moses, and which testified to the His presence in the Mishkan.

Moreover, the Mishkan was built as a sign that G-d had forgiven the people for the sin of the golden calf, through which the Divine presence became more distant from them. Now, with the building of the Mishkan, and specifically the Ark, it bore testimony that G-d had completely forgiven them and was willing to dwell in their midst once more.

We can now appreciate why Betzalel was so partial to the building of the Mishkan in general and the construction of the Ark in particular. There was nothing more precious

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

to him than the return of the Divine presence that was affected by the Ark.

The Grandson of Chur

But, the question still persists. Surely, there were other righteous people who appreciated the holiness of the Ark, as well as the incredible kindness and compassion of G-d that He was willing to ignore their past indiscretion and to reconnect to them by way of the Ark. Why, of all the good people that were instrumental in the construction of the Ark, did Betzalel feel this unparalleled emotional attachment?

The answer is alluded to in the way the Torah introduces Betzalel: “Betzalel the son of Uri the son of Chur.” Why does the Torah have to mention his grandfather in describing who he was, unlike his companion Ahaliav where the Torah just mentions his father’s name?

In truth, the answer to this question will shed light on Betzalel’s unique attachment to the Ark.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Chur, Betzalel's grandfather, was one of the leaders of the Jewish people. He was the son of Miriam, Moses' sister and enjoyed Moses' confidence. When Moses climbed the mountain to receive the Torah, he put Chur and Aaron in charge of the people, as recorded in the Book of Exodus. After the story of the golden calf we no longer find his name mentioned. What happened to him?

Our Sages tell us that when the instigators of the golden calf approached him with their idea of its construction, he took strong exception to this "project." They could not take his militant stance against the golden calf and they killed him. In other words, Chur gave his life in the attempt to prevent the grave sin of the golden calf which "drove" G-d away from the Jewish people.

Betzalel, thus, felt an especially keen sense of attachment to that which reversed the effects of the golden calf. He therefore experienced great affinity to the Ark, the very antithesis of the idolatrous calf. Betzalel was imbued with the devotion to G-d's presence in this

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

world as was his grandfather Chur. His name is therefore mentioned as the one who constructed the Ark.

Our Generation in Reverse Mode

This devotion to the construction of the Ark as a reversal of the golden calf is relevant to the mission of our generation in particular. We have witnessed the greatest removal of G-d's presence from this world as a result of the many anti-religious and anti-Jewish movements that have sprung up in the last two centuries.

All these isms, spearheaded in many instances by rebellious Jews are the modern version of the Jewish people constructing a golden calf to worship, and in many ways they represent a reenactment of the golden calf debacles. G-d has been “pushed” out of the consciousness of the world because of these movements.

However, there have been many Churs and Betzalels who have dedicated their lives to reverse this trend by resisting these

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

movements and by building Sanctuaries and Arks, literally and figuratively, that reintroduce G-d to the world and the world to G-d. And it is these efforts that will result in the coming of Moshiach when the Temple will be rebuilt and the Ark restored to its place.

At that time, honorable mention will extend to the Churs of the world who fought the anti-G-d forces of society, and especially to the Betzalels who were proactive in paving the way for Moshiach; those who do not give up in their pleas to G-d and their G-dly actions to bring the Redemption and make the world a “dwelling place” for Him.

ESSAY EIGHT

SHABBOS SHABBOS

There are times when we have to prevent
people from expressing too much zeal.

In some extreme situations excessive zeal can
cause us to trample over other values.

The Torah determines when, and how to
channel our deepest soul powers.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY EIGHT

SHABBOS SHABBOS

Shabbos Again?

This week's parsha records Moses gathering of the Jewish People to transmit G-d's instructions about the building of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert. But, before he tells them all of the detailed instructions concerning that construction project, Moses first conveys G-d's commandment to observe the Sabbath.

This raises an obvious question. Didn't they already hear about the commandment to observe the Sabbath? Remembering the Shabbos and refraining from work is explicitly mentioned in the Ten Commandments that they heard months

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

earlier from G-d at Sinai. Why the need for a refresher course?

One could not answer that this new communication was needed because of the addition of some details that are not mentioned in the Ten Commandments, because there are actually fewer details here than there are in the Ten Commandments. Most of the details were left out here as well, and were surely supplemented by Moses in the course of their sojourn in the desert. If there were no new details now, why the need for the repetition?

Building the Mishkan does not Override Shabbos

Rashi seems to have anticipated this question when he explains that this commandment to observe the Shabbos was given here to establish that as important as it is to build a Sanctuary for G-d, they should not build it on the Shabbos.

This answer also appears to be somewhat problematic. In the preceding parsha, Moses

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

also is recorded as speaking to the Children of Israel about the building of the Mishkan. There too he also commands them to observe the Shabbos. And Rashi makes the same observation that the reason the Torah juxtaposes the building of the Mishkan with Shabbos is to underscore the preeminence of the Shabbos over the building of the Mishkan. One may not build the Sanctuary on Shabbos.

If this lesson has already been transmitted in the earlier parsha, why is it repeated again in this week's Torah reading?

Shabbos in Context

The Rebbe provides us with a simple explanation by way of an observation as to how the two commandments are juxtaposed in these two sections.

When one examines the first lesson in last week's parsha, the reference to the Shabbos comes after the building of the Mishkan. It comes as a qualifier. As Rashi puts it:

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

“Even though I’ve commanded you to build a Mishkan, don’t do it on the Shabbos.”

In this context, the primary command is to build a Mishkan, but as a caveat, the Torah adds that it should not be done on the Shabbos.

In this week’s parsha the order is reversed, first he commands them to observe the Sabbath and afterwards comes the command to build the Mishkan.

The Rebbe explains: In the preceding parsha it describes the command given to Moses; whereas our parsha describes the way Moses presented it to the people. G-d was concerned that their zealously to build the Mishkan would cause them to rush and build it even on the Sabbath. They were so eager to construct the Mishkan because they knew that it would constitute confirmation that their atonement for the construction of the golden calf was procured. They therefore had to be cautioned not to violate the Sabbath even for the building of the Mishkan.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

When Moses delivered G-d's command to the people, however, he felt that in order for the warning, not to violate the Sabbath in their zeal to complete the construction, to be effective, he had to reverse the order of the two commandments and mention the command to observe the Shabbos first. By hearing about the importance of the Sabbath first, this would impress them with its seriousness, and would have a greater impact on them.

Two Narratives; Two Aspects of Shabbos

On a spiritual level it may be suggested that there are actually two different aspects of Shabbos that are reflected in these two narratives.

To understand the difference between the two ways of viewing the relationship between the construction of the Mishkan and the Shabbos it is important to note the specifics of each mention of Shabbos in these two adjoining Torah portions.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In the preceding parsha, where the Shabbos is mentioned second, two salient points are made about the Shabbos:

The Preeminence of Shabbos

First: It is a “sign” between G-d and the Jewish nation. In this context Shabbos serves as a reminder of the status of the unique status of the Jewish people as a chosen nation. When we observe the Shabbos, the Shabbos protects and preserves us.

Second: The Sabbath is an eternal sign for all future generations.

This then was G-d’s message to them:

The Mishkan was a medium through which G-d demonstrated his love for us. Particularly after the golden calf debacle, when G-d threatened to distance Himself from the Jewish people, the building of the Mishkan gave them a sigh of relief. It was a sign that G-d had completely forgiven them and was willing to dwell in their midst.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

To prevent the Jewish people from overzealously thinking that its construction overrode the Sabbath, the Torah therefore underscores that the Shabbos actually has an advantage over the Mishkan, and the construction of the Mishkan takes a back seat to the Sabbath.

The Sabbath, Rashi states is a “great” or “significant” sign because it represents G-d giving us His own day of rest. From this vantage point, the Shabbos is a more dramatic expression of G-d’s relationship with us than the Mishkan.

Furthermore, the Mishkan’s existence was not always guaranteed. Since the destruction of the Second Temple close to two thousand years ago, we no longer have a physical Sanctuary in which G-d’s presence is revealed. Yet, the Shabbos, is a day that signifies G-d’s love for us and His presence amongst us, for all future generations, as the Torah stresses.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Shabbos: The Great Unifier

In this week's Torah portion the emphasis and tone on the Sabbath is a different one.

The Torah portion begins with the word: "Vayakhel-And he Gathered," referring to Moses gathering of the entire Jewish nation to tell them about the Sabbath and the Mishkan.

This event was first and foremost a manifestation of Jewish unity. In this context, the Sabbath and Mishkan are both ways of unifying the nation. Indeed, the Midrash exhorts us to gather together on the Shabbos and teach Torah to the people. And it is based on this portion that juxtaposes the gathering of the Jews to the commandment to keep the Sabbath.

Here one readily can see why the Sabbath precedes the building of the Mishkan. It is only through the unity that comes through communal Torah study on the Sabbath that can create a true unity, without which the Mishkan cannot possibly last. The Second Temple, the successor to the First Temple

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

and the Mishkan, was destroyed because we were not unified. G-d dwells only in a place that is “whole,” not where there is fragmentation and discord.

With this understanding of the difference between this week’s presentation of the Shabbos and last week’s we can resolve a few other discrepancies between the two:

Holiness and Rest: Which comes First?

In last week’s parsha the Torah first asserts that the Sabbath is holy, and only afterwards does it say that we should work for six days and rest on the Shabbos. In this week’s parsha the order is reversed: First it says we should work for six days and rest on the Sabbath, and afterwards it describes the Shabbos as holy. What is the reason for this difference?

In light of the foregoing analysis we can see why in the preceding parsha the Torah had to assert first that the Sabbath is holy. Since it was a response to their possible desire to break the Sabbath in order to hasten the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

process that would make them feel the holiness of the Mishkan, the Torah therefore prefaces the fact that it is a holy day. One need not and may not override the holiness of the Sabbath for the sake of the holiness of the Mishkan.

In this week's parsha the emphasis is on the positive nature of the Sabbath as a day of gathering that fosters unity, a necessary prerequisite for and ingredient in the building of the Mishkan. Hence the Torah prefaces the role of the Sabbath as a day of rest before it discusses its holy character. The fact that it is a day of rest is the reason why it is conducive for gatherings that facilitate the public study of Torah that fosters true and enduring unity.

Guarding Shabbos

Another difference between the two “versions” of the Shabbos that could be clarified in light of the above analysis:

In last week's parsha the Torah repeats the need to “guard” the Sabbath. This term

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

implies refraining from work to preserve its sanctity.

However, in this week's parsha no mention is made of "guarding" or preserving the Shabbos

This makes sense in light of the above. When the Torah wishes to impress upon us the holiness of the Sabbath so that it is not compromised for the purpose of building the Mishkan, the Torah uses the term "guarding" or "preserving." However, in this week's parsha, where the emphasis is not on its holiness rather on its capacity to unify us, the term guarding is irrelevant and therefore omitted.

Active or Passive Shabbos

One final difference: In this week's parsha the Torah prefaces the commandment of the Sabbath as a command to "do them." Here the Torah speaks of resting on the Sabbath, which is a passive thing. Why then does the Torah preface this commandment with a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

term that implies that there is an active component to the resting of the Sabbath?

In light of the above it is clear. Here the emphasis is not on the holiness of the Sabbath and the need to preserve it; the emphasis is on the fact that the Sabbath is a day for doing, for creating an atmosphere that will bring everyone together to actively study Torah as a unified group. The resting part is only that which provides the opportunity for the gathering and unity. Hence the word “to do.”

Preparing for the Shabbos of the Future

The Messianic Age has been designated as the Sabbath of creation, for which we must prepare in the last moments of exile that parallel the six days of work.

Our goal in the Messianic Age is twofold: We will all feel the presence of G-d through the construction of the Third Temple, and we will all be united as one people.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

To prepare for that perpetual Sabbath, it behooves us now to concentrate on preserving the sanctity of the Sabbath and by utilizing the Sabbath for purposes of unity.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY NINE

HERE WE GO AGAIN!

Judaism fuses objective devotion with
subjective feelings.

These two expressions are reflected in the
command to build a Sanctuary and the follow-
up command for the Kohanim to wear Priestly
garments.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY NINE

HERE WE GO AGAIN!

Mishkan and Garments Divided in Two Sections

In this week's double-header the Torah repeats the details of the construction of the Mishkan and the making of the priestly garments.

Even the way the Torah divided the discussion of the Mishkan and the priestly garments into two parshiyos—Terumah and Teztaveh respectively—is repeated in this week's double parsha.

In parshas Vayakhel the Torah describes the manner in which the Mishkan and its vessels were to be constructed; whereas parshas Pikudei focuses on the making of the priestly garments.

Why are these two themes separated into two sections? Why couldn't the Torah

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

discuss the priestly garments together with the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels?

Independent Mitzvah and Subsidiary Mitzvah

One answer given is based on the way Maimonides classified the 613 commandments.

While he lists the building of the Mishkan and its vessels as a Biblical commandment, he does not consider making the priestly garments an independent Biblical commandment. Rather, the priestly garments were considered accessories to the service performed by the Kohain-Priest in the Temple. If he were to have performed the service without the priestly garments, the service would be invalid. But there is no independent Mitzvah to make the priestly garments. By contrast, there is a specific Mitzvah to build the Mishkan and its vessels.

This answer, however, invites three other questions:

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

(a) What difference does it really make if a certain action is deemed to have intrinsic value or if it is merely an accessory to another Mitzvah?

(b) Why is the construction of the Mishkan viewed as an intrinsic Mitzvah, whereas the making of the garments is considered to be more of an embellishment to another Mitzvah—the Mitzvah of performing the service in the Temple?

(c) Since every detail of Torah knowledge must be applied to our own lives, we must understand what message does this distinction between the Mishkan and the garments convey to us.

Two Components of Judaism

Building a Mishkan represents the way we are required to create a G-dly environment. It does not suffice for one to do G-dly things; one must also build a family, home, community and nation—and ultimately a world—that is hospitable to G-d. Sure, by building the home etc. we are then capable of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

offering services to G-d. But, there is something to be said about our building of a G-dly environment, in and of itself.

A garment, by contrast, is tailor made for one individual. A Priest who would wear a garment that was too long or too short not only did not qualify to do the service in the Temple, but was, moreover, disgracing and invalidating the service. There is no intrinsic value in making a garment because if it is not used by the individual for whom it was intended it has no value. When the garment is worn properly it adds dignity and honor to the one who performs the service.

In other words: Judaism possesses two components: There are actions that possess objective positive value regardless of how they resonate with a particular individual. This is analogous to the building of the Mishkan, a structure that was not limited to one individual.

Judaism also possesses subjective “garments” that enhance the objective actions that we do. These “garments” make the Mitzvah that

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

we do more appealing and fulfilling. A garment helps us express our own individuality, taste and dignity.

But, while creating objective structures is inherently positive, focusing on our subjective tastes and preferences in our Judaism has no value unless it actually accompanies concrete and objective action. Self-expression might be a human need, but it does not take the place of building a Sanctuary for G-d in ways that conform to His instructions.

Frequently we endeavor to express our soul's yearning to be closer to G-d in our own subjective way. And while G-d must certainly appreciate the good intentions involved, these same "garments," or means of self-expression that accompany objective performances of Mitzvos carry an infinitely higher form of spirituality than the making of the garments themselves.

For Ourselves or for Others?

Another lesson: The building of a Mishkan is what we do for others, the garment is what

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

we wear ourselves. Selfless devotion to the communal needs is always viewed as having intrinsic value. One can expend time, effort and energy to prepare for one's own spiritual growth (analogous to the making garments for eventual service in the Temple), but if we fail to actually use it in a concrete way, all of those efforts were essentially in vain.

But when we create mechanisms and structures for **others** to serve G-d, that very process constitutes a Mitzvah. Any and every effort to create opportunities for the community is an inherently positive event.

Since we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, we have been engaged in the process of making this entire world a “dwelling place for G-d.” Every Mitzvah that we perform is like a brick that we lay that will become the magnificent palace for G-d in the Messianic Age. Every Mitzvah thus possesses intrinsic and enduring value.

To be sure, it is important that we wear the right garments while we do the Mitzvah. We should definitely add class, beauty and

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

dignity to the Mitzvah. The manner in which we do the Mitzvah may certainly help us express our soul's yearnings and aspirations and need for self-expression. And these garments will certainly help us look more presentable as we welcome Moshiach into our homes. But they can never take the place of the Mitzvah itself.

Living in the imperfect world of Galus-exile often compels us to sacrifice one value for another. When we concentrate on doing objectively positive things we lose sight of the beauty and the embellishments that glorify our actions. Similarly, when we get into the mode of decorating ourselves we may lose sight of the importance of the action itself.

The Messianic Age will remove those impediments and we will be able to comfortably fuse the objective actions with the most beautiful garments.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TEN

PUT OUT THE FIRES!

**Shabbos is a day of rest, peace, tranquility
and holiness.**

**Our part in observing Shabbos and
preserving its serenity is to avoid all conflict.
The Shabbos itself will do the rest.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TEN

PUT OUT THE FIRES!

One of Thirty-Nine

This week's parsha of *Vayakhel* begins with Moses gathering all of the Jewish nation to convey to them G-d's instructions concerning the building of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert. However, before discussing the details of the contributions to the Mishkan and its construction, Moses transmits to them G-d's command concerning the Shabbos: "For six days work may be done, but the seventh day should be holy for you, a day of complete rest to G-d."

Immediately after this general exhortation to observe the Shabbos by refraining from work, Moses mentions one of the thirty-nine forms of work prohibited on the Shabbos: "You should not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

From Talmudic times to the present our Sages and Torah commentators have addressed the question as to why the Torah mentions only this one Sabbath prohibition. All of the thirty-nine categories of proscribed work are derived in the Talmud by the way the Torah juxtaposes the commandment to build the Mishkan with the requirement to rest on the Shabbos. From this we derive that all those activities that were instrumental in the construction of the Mishkan may not be performed on Shabbos. Why then does the Torah have to specify the prohibition against lighting a fire if it is already implied in the general command against work on Shabbos?

Avoid Discord

One answer with an ethical focus has been offered in which the commandment against lighting a fire is to be understood allegorically as a reference to disputes in which fiery anger and passion that are kindled are very likely to disrupt the tranquility of the Shabbos. The Torah's

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

message here is thus: While discord and strife is a destructive fire that should be avoided every day of the week, it is even more damaging when it occurs on the Shabbos.

What precisely is the relationship between this form of fire and the Shabbos? And why is this specific aspect of Sabbath desecration mentioned **here** in the context of building a Mishkan? The commandment to observe the Sabbath is mentioned several times in the Torah. Why then was this specific command concerning lighting fires not mentioned before? And, more generally, why does the Torah link the laws concerning the Shabbos with the construction of the Mishkan?

To answer all these questions we must first understand at least one aspect of the spiritual dimension of the Shabbos.

Beyond Rest

Shabbos is more than just a day of rest. It is the day that brings perfection to the entire week that precedes it. When we engage in our everyday activities during the work

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

week—with which we attempt to construct our own personal sanctuaries for G-d—we may not consciously feel our connection to G-d. Even when we devote time for daily Torah study and do our best to observe all of the commandments that govern our lives, we frequently feel that the weekday and work-related pressures deprive our Torah study and Mitzvos observance of some, if not most, of their power. Our minds and hearts may be in some other place, and our actions suffer from a lack of soul. Our Mishkans collapse.

All of these distractions can, happily, be remedied with the onset of the Sabbath. Shabbos, with its heightened spirituality, has the capacity to perfect our Torah study and Mitzvos observance and thereby reverse all of the failures of the preceding week. Shabbos, Chassidic thought asserts, not only gives us a respite from the negativity that we experienced during our weekday activities. To the contrary, it actually elevates the days and activities of the past week.

This concept is based on the Chassidic interpretation of the words we recite in the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Kiddush recited as we usher in the Shabbos every Friday night. In this prayer we cite the verse in Genesis that states:

“The heavens, the earth and all their hosts were completed. On the seventh day, He rested from all His work that he had done.”

Completed and Made Complete

By employing the term “completed” the Torah is simply stating that G-d finished the work of creation before the onset of the first Sabbath. According to Chassidic thought the term “completed” conveys a much more profound idea: all the works which He did during the preceding six days were made complete on the Shabbos.

Without the Shabbos, G-d’s handiwork is incomplete. By definition then, all of our creations are inherently flawed because we are finite beings. Perfection is the province of the Divine.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

When G-d created the universe during the six days of creation, He withdrew His infinite light to allow for a finite world. However, Shabbos is when G-d removes the shield that eclipses His infinite light and allows G-dly perfection to enter the world. As long as we do not create our own obstructions that prevent the infinite light to enter our lives, we can access the world of Divine perfection. As a result, all of our flawed efforts of the past week are endowed with a dimension of G-dly perfection.

Generally speaking, the things that we can do to render us resistant to the prevailing infinite light on the Shabbos are the thirty-nine forms of work the Torah prohibits. These activities are essentially physically creative acts that demonstrate our own abilities to change the world. G-d gave us these talents to become His partners in creation. By utilizing these talents we can make the world a better place, one that is suitable for human existence. Once the world is a civilized, habitable world, we can then introduce into it G-dly energy and transform

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the world—micro and macro—into a Mishkan.

If, however, we begin to believe in our own abilities and ingenuity and imagine ourselves capable of changing the world without the introduction of the Divine element, we are destined to fail. Only when we withdraw from active creation during Shabbos and disengage from the finite can we become receptive to the Infinite. And the consequence of that is that we acquire the capability of retroactively investing our weekday efforts with the ability to truly make a difference. By observing the Shabbos all of our efforts at constructing the Mishkan during the preceding week are crowned with success.

In addition to the general need to desist from the thirty-nine forms of work (to construct our Mishkan during the week but that undermines that very construction effort if we were to continue doing it on the Sabbath), there is one other specific imperative for Shabbos to “succeed.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

A Barrier to Shabbos

If Shabbos turns into a day of division it creates a new barrier to the realization of the Infinite state of perfection. If the leisure time afforded us by our absence of work should lead to strife and conflict, the perfection of the week on Shabbos is lost to us.

There is a Kabbalistic aphorism: “The Holy one, Blessed is He dwells only in a whole location.” This echoes the sentiment expressed in our daily prayers: “Bless us our father, all of us together as one.” Where does G-d’s blessing dwell? In a place of peace and harmony. Our Sages articulated this idea most forcefully and poignantly—in the end of the Mishnah, symbolizing the end of our existence in exile—“G-d could not find a vessel that contains a blessing other than that of peace, as it says, ‘G-d will give His people strength; G-d will bless His nation with peace.’”

There is no place more holy than the Mishkan, and no time more holy and harmonious than the Shabbos. Only our

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

“fires” of anger and discord can undermine our ability to access the extraordinary blessing of the Shabbos.

Thus prior to commanding us about building the Mishkan in the six work days the Torah commands us to observe the Shabbos. This is to underscore that if we want the Divine to dwell in our midst during the week we must properly observe the Shabbos. And the Torah follows this command with the one of not lighting a fire to underscore that the Shabbos functions as it was designed to only when there is tranquility, peace and unity in our midst. If the fires are kindled on the Shabbos this denies us the opportunity to touch the Infinite.

* * *

The Vessel for the Light of Moshiach

The last time we were privileged to hear the Rebbe’s words spoken in public in 1992, the Rebbe emphasized the theme of Vayakhel: “And he **gathered**” with which this week’s parsha commences that underscores the theme of unity.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

For eleven months prior to this talk the Rebbe spoke to us consistently and persistently about the imminence of Moshiach's coming and the true and complete Geulah. The Rebbe also illuminated the straightforward path we ought to take to prepare ourselves for the Messianic Era: by learning the Torah's teachings about Moshiach and translating this knowledge into our conduct in our daily lives. In the final Shabbos before the Rebbe suffered a stroke, his final instruction to us to date was: Vayakhel: Jewish unity!

Why?

Moshiach represents the introduction of a revolutionary measure of G-dly light and goodness into the world. It is called "the Shabbos of existence." It is the ultimate manifestation of blessing which will engulf the world, bringing perpetual goodness, holiness and peace in its wake. However, to be receptive to the phenomenal blessing of Moshiach we need peace and unity that is based on genuine Ahavat Yisrael.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

May we all take the Rebbe's message to heart and focus our collective energies on that which unites us. And may we march towards the final Redemption as one unified nation with the spirit of boundless joy!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY ELEVEN

**SHABBOS AND THE
MISHKAN: PATENT
PROTECTED**

The Shabbos and the Mishkan are the two most dramatic representations of G-d's vision for the
Messianic Age.

They were given as a gift to the Jewish people whose mission it is to create a Dwelling Place for G-d throughout the world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY ELEVEN

SHABBOS AND THE MISHKAN: PATENT PROTECTED

First Commands after Moses' Return

This week's parsha begins with the words: "Moses gathered the whole community of the children of Israel and he said to them, **"These** are the things that G-d commanded to be done."**"** The Torah then enumerates two things that G-d commanded: Shabbos and the building of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary.

As Rashi informs us, this occurred the day after Yom Kippur, the day Moses returned from Mount Sinai with the second tablets. Moses certainly had more than two things to report. Yet, commentators raise the question, it seems that these two themes—Shabbos and the Mishkan—were the only two things

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

that were on G-d's and Moses' minds at that time.

Moreover, the words Moses used, “**These** are the things that G-d commanded” implied that these were the only things G-d commanded. How could that be, considering the fact that all 613 commandments were given at Mount Sinai, not only Shabbos and the construction of the Mishkan?

The following is an expanded version of an explanation offered in the 19th century work, *Ksav Sofer*:

Of all the 613 Mitzvos of that were given at Mount Sinai, there are only two which could not possibly be observed without G-d's express commandment to the people to perform them. These two are Shabbos observance and the construction of the Mishkan.

To elaborate:

Pre-Sinai Judaism

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Prior to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, anyone could have volunteered to observe any of the commandments.

The Talmud relates that Abraham observed all of the Mitzvos even though they were not yet obligatory. Although the Torah had not been given “officially” its precepts were known to earlier generations. Noah, for example, was told to bring two of the non-kosher species into the Ark and seven pairs of the kosher species. He had to know the laws that distinguish kosher from non-kosher species.

There was one notable exception to the general license to observe any Mitzvah even if it was not yet mandated: Shabbos observance. Shabbos is a gift given exclusively to the Jewish people at Sinai. It is not just a day of rest; it is when we connect to our inner spiritual rhythm that empowers us to fulfill our specific mission as Jews.

To help understand why Shabbos is exclusively a Jewish observance, we must first

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

clarify the respective roles of Jews and non-Jews assigned to them by the Torah.

The Master Plan

G-d created the universe with a purpose and a plan. The purpose is for the world which exists in a G-dly “vacuum” (referred to by the Kabbalists as “*makom panuy*—“Empty Space”) created by G-d (in a process which the Kabbalists called *tzimtzum*-contraction, or the “withdrawal” of the Infinite light of G-d that pervaded that “space”) should reintroduce the Infinite G-dly presence into that vacuum. In the famous words of the Midrash: “G-d desired a dwelling place in the lowest of worlds.”

How does the world go about achieving this goal?

The answer is that it involves a two pronged approach. To make the world a G-dly world it first has to be a **goodly** world; a world that is civilized, inhabited, just and respectful of its G-dly Source. To use a simple analogy: a wealthy person commissions the construction

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

of a beautiful and ornate mansion. To build this dream house the magnate hires the best builders and decorators money can buy. Yet the house will not be occupied unless its foundations are sound and secure and unless the earth is leveled and the area is environmentally safe. One does not want to discover that one's home is built on a landfill rife with harmful chemicals that will ultimately leach and spread their deadly fumes into the home, rendering it uninhabitable.

This objective of making the world a civilized and morally clean world is a universal one. This mission is achieved by subscribing to and observing the seven Noahide commandments that were originally given to Noah after the flood that destroyed a world that failed to heed these principles, given even earlier to Adam. These commandments were later reiterated at Sinai and entrusted to the Jewish nation to transmit these tenets to all of humanity.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The Second Prong

At Sinai, G-d introduced the second prong of His Master Plan to the world; this was the part for which only one nation—the Jewish nation—was chosen. This component goes beyond “just” laying the ground work for the ultimate reintroduction of the Divine within the world. It demands of us to create the magnificent structure with all of the most exquisite furnishings. This we achieve by way of performing the Mitzvos, most of which involve using the physical objects of the world for a Divine purpose.

This mission was specifically given to the Jewish people. This includes those who were born Jewish and those who converted to Judaism according to G-d’s instructions as delineated in the Torah. A non-Jew’s mission, for which he or she was given the resources to fulfill, is to create the backdrop for all of the efforts of the Jewish people. Their task is to help build a just and stable society. In Talmudic terms this is called “*yishuvo shel olam*,” settling and stabilizing the world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Non-Jews who feel they have the passion to join the mission entrusted to the Jewish people have to engage in much soul-searching. Are they truly endowed with a Jewish soul, i.e., the resources to transform themselves and their environment into a G-dly place or do they possess the wherewithal to lend support to the overall mission by creating a most stable foundation? If, after much introspection and study, they come to the conclusion that they are ready for the greater responsibility—which is also fraught with far more hardship, potential for failure, suffering and pain along with the rewards—they must then consult a competent rabbinic authority to go through the process of *geirus-Halachic* conversion. This process does not really change their identities as much as it reveals that they always had that potential. The souls of righteous converts also stood at Mount Sinai and enthusiastically embraced the Torah that embodies this specific mission.

Thus, the non-Jew's focus is to help build the world; create the infrastructure and make the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

necessary advances in all areas such as, but not limited to, science, medicine and agriculture. One does not have a vacation from his or her life's mission. Even when a person must rest in order to physically and emotionally survive, he or she is not really shirking his or her mission, it is just a temporary pause to enable one to get back on track.

Deconstruction

For the Jewish individual whose role is to introduce the Divine into an already existing civilized society, his or her unique role is to uncover the spirituality and the G-dly energy within the world. The vacuum that was created at the time of Creation is a façade. In truth, G-d never left the world that He created; He just created that reality to exist from our vantage point. Our role and mission therefore is not constructing a world per se, but deconstructing the façade.

Towards that end we were given the Shabbos, not simply as a day of rest from

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

weekday activity, but more profoundly a day that takes us away from building a world; a function that we share with the rest of society. Shabbos reveals our true distinctive purpose.

Thus, our Sages tell us that Shabbos is a patently Jewish day. While everyone needs rest, only the Jewish soul needs to be given the opportunity to rise above mundane activity. We must even rise above “Tikkun Olam,” repairing the world. That is the function of humanity; not exclusively the Jewish people. In addition to our universal role we also have a crucial parochial goal of removing the veil from and uncovering the Divine in the physical world.

In other words, “rest” for humanity is an accessory to building; it is not the end. For the Jew, Shabbos rest **is** the goal and it ultimately must inform, inspire and elevate the work he or she does the rest of the week.

Shabbos and Mishkan: Symbols of the Future

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

We can now understand why Shabbos and the construction of the Mishkan were singled out as the commandments which required specific Divine sanction to perform.

As stated, the Shabbos was not intended for “export.” Shabbos highlights our very unique mission as Jews. And when Jews realize their potential and fulfill their mission it gives strength and inspiration to all of humanity and enables them to succeed in their own mission.

When Moses returned on Yom Kippur with the Second Tablets he gathered the people together as a nation (*Vayakhel*) to inform them of their role which would distinguish them from the rest of humanity. Thus Moses states: “**These** are the things that G-d commanded to be done,” to dramatize this uniquely Jewish role that was given at Mount Sinai. Without an express commandment from G-d no one has the right to appropriate the Shabbos dynamic.

Likewise the Mishkan was not merely a place for worship. It was to represent the finished

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

product of G-d's plan for the universe. It was to represent a world that has finally removed the veil, in its entirety, so that all of humanity will see G-d's presence in every aspect of life. To achieve this goal, G-d specifically chose the Jewish people. Therefore, without an express commandment from G-d to build the Mishkan it would have simply been another shrine or spiritual enclave. It would not have possessed the unique representation of the world of the future.

The Shabbos and the Mishkan are thus the two most dramatic representations of G-d's vision for the Messianic Age.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWELVE

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE

The feminine spiritual dynamic is from a
transcendent G-dly source.

The future Messianic Age will be the age
where the higher feminine energy will
prevail.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWELVE

THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE

The First Responders

When the Torah relates in this week's parsha the way the Jewish people responded to Moses' call to contribute to the building of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert, it places a greater emphasis on the role of the women: "The men came with the women." According to our Sages, it implies that the women were the first to respond to Moses' initiative and brought their husbands with them.

A few verses later the Torah again describes the superior nature of the women's skill in fashioning the goat hair for the covering of the Mishkan. The phraseology employed, Rashi says, implies that they were able to spin the goat hair while the hair was still on the goat.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

To buttress the importance of the role of women, our Sages contrast the women's behavior with respect to the contributions towards the construction of the Mishkan with their adamant refusal to contribute anything for the construction of the golden calf.

Rosh Chodesh Reward

That the women had a unique role in the construction of the Mishkan was not overlooked by G-d. The women were rewarded with the observance of Rosh Chodesh, the Head of the Jewish months, as their special holiday. According to Jewish tradition, women desist from certain domestic chores, such as doing laundry, on Rosh Chodesh as their way of observing this holiday that was given specifically to them.

Three questions arise here:

First, why did G-d reward them specifically with the observance of Rosh Chodesh?

Second, in what way does refraining from certain chores on Rosh Chodesh express the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

tremendous dedication and zeal with which the women distinguished themselves? Shouldn't women have been given something more dramatic, positive, and celebratory as a reward?

Third, *Ba'al Haturim* cites a verse in the Book of Esther with a similar beginning of a verse in our parsha concerning the role of women:

In this parsha it says,

“All the women whose heart inspired them with wisdom spun the goats' hair.”

In the Book of Esther it says,

“All the women will give honor to their husbands.”

What connection can there possibly be between the phenomenal dedication and wisdom of the women with the advice given to the Persian monarch Achashveirosh by his pagan advisor Memuchan, whom our Sages identify as none other than the wicked Haman?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

One can offer the following resolution to all of these questions:

Feminine Challenge

According to the teachings of Kabbalah the spiritual feminine attributes are more powerful than the masculine powers; they derive from a transcendent dimension of G-dly light. To be sure, both men and women possess both masculine and feminine spiritual qualities; it is just that women generally have a greater preponderance of this superior energy.

This dynamic—where the feminine quality is superior to the masculine quality—was in effect before Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and fed it to Adam. From that time onward the challenge that was given to both women and men has been to restore this spiritual feminine quality to its rightful position. In the Messianic Age, when we will realize that goal, evil will cease and all the negative effects of the eating of the forbidden fruit will be removed, thereby allowing the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

feminine dynamic to once again be in the ascendancy.

When Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and then gave it to her husband, it caused the concealment of G-d's transcendent presence in the world. When Eve was "cursed" as a result of her involvement it should not be taken, G-d forbid, as a curse, but rather as a challenge to women in particular to help restore the feminine spiritual dynamic to its original position.

One of the so called "curses" enumerated by the Talmud is the traditional role of women to perform domestic chores, thereby serving the needs of their husbands and families. By this form of "subordination," which helps to foster domestic peace and tranquility, they are instrumental in restoring the spiritual equilibrium that was upset by Eve at the beginning of time.

There were exceptions to this general rule of women. The Matriarch Sarah is cited as the one who did the most, before the Torah was given, to rectify Eve's denigration of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

feminine spiritual position. Thus G-d tells Abraham, “Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice.” Sarah’s reversal of the decline caused by Eve manifested itself in G-d commanding Abraham to follow Sarah’s dictates even when Abraham felt uncomfortable with it.

This “reversal” of the respective masculine and feminine roles occurs again at Mount Sinai. The Torah is the ultimate power that rectifies the decline of the relationship of G-d with the world that commenced with Adam and Eve’s transgression. And when G-d tells Moses to prepare them for the giving of the Torah He tells him to address the women first. This was an affirmation that the world was to be given the potential to overcome the decline that relegated the feminine spirituality to a lesser degree of importance.

This reminder of the superior role of women and the feminine dynamic was given to us once more with the construction of the Mishkan. While only a select group of men were motivated to contribute, all the women participated, and all of them acting with the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

same zeal, ingenuity and creativity. This was their way of demonstrating that they understood their role of reversing the darkness which was introduced with the sin of Adam and Eve and then again with the construction of the golden calf, an act which our Sages tell us was, in reality, a reenactment of the sin of Adam and Eve.

To show the women that their superior role has “registered” with G-d and has begun to change the world and prepare it for the Messianic Age, women were relieved of their domestic chores on Rosh Chodesh. Why?

Moonlighting

Rosh Chodesh, which coincides with the birth of the moon, is understood by our Sages as a metaphor for the emergence of Moshiach’s soul into this world which possesses the potential to change the world permanently. Rosh Chodesh, with the birth of the moon—the feminine celestial body—is the symbol of the feminine dynamic which is on the decline

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

in our day and age, but which will eventually shine with the light equal to that of the sun.

To avoid any confusion, this does not mean that there will be, nor should there be, a reversal of our distinct physical roles and distinctive gender differences between men and women. Indeed, the Torah strongly prohibits men and women from wearing each other's attire. The ascendancy of femininity in the Messianic Age is entirely a spiritual one. The feminine quality, among other aspects, is one of greater sensitivity to spirituality and of less resistance to the internal faith and connection to G-d we all have embedded within our psyche.

Spiritual masculinity is the ability to conquer "the foreign" and to bring it under G-d's sovereignty. Spiritual masculinity is fighting the enemies of decency and G-dly morality, including the physical need to defend ourselves from those who would attempt to harm us, as in the days of Purim. The six days of the week when we struggle to earn a living and survive is referred to by the Kabbalah as "masculine days" because they

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

are dedicated to preparing the world for Shabbos, the ultimate day of feminine peace, spirituality, and tranquility. The weekdays are days of battle and conquest. Shabbos is victory and a taste of the future Messianic peace

Feminine spirituality, by contrast, is not about conquest nor waging defensive wars. Rather, it is to reveal and nurture the treasures we already possess. When conquest is no longer necessary because all of the “foreign” territories will have been “liberated,” in the Messianic Age, we each will still need to probe more deeply into the inner precincts of our soul to discover even deeper spiritual feelings, to cultivate and nurture them. In the time of peace that will exist on all levels that will occasion the Messianic Age, and when all of our physical and spiritual enemies will be either eliminated or transformed into allies and supporters, the need for the masculine dynamic will recede and the feminine ideal will arise and dominate. It will be a permanent Shabbos.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Every Rosh Chodesh, we get a taste of this future. The Messianic energies are then more pronounced, and women—who personify the feminine spiritual dynamic—are therefore relieved of their domestic chores. This is not a insignificant way of rewarding women. It is our way of ever so subtly hinting to the world that we are on the cusp of the future Redemption. We are beginning to experience the time when the “curse” of Eve’s subordination and its concomitant relegation of the feminine role to the background is about to end. We will no longer be living in a world that requires aggression in our attempts at self defense and conquest. It will be a world of Shabbos—a feminine day—where all of our needs are taken care of, and we do not need to perform the domestic chores, as time when we no longer have to feel the subordination of the feminine to the masculine.

Undermining Haman’s Plan

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

We can now understand the connection of the verse that speaks of the women donating to the Mishkan and, similarly, that it was the women who were told by the Persian monarch to give honor to their husbands.

When we, men and particularly women, contribute to the construction of the Sanctuaries in our own homes, we remove the curse of exile that is associated by the Persian monarch Achashveirosh.

Memuchan, or Haman, wanted to enshrine the idea of the subordination of the redemptive feminine dynamic and institutionalize exile.

Instead Esther, the symbol of Jewish femininity that is concealed—as the word "Esther" itself is etymologically related to the word "concealed"—becomes the dominant force over the entire Persian Empire. And it is precisely this power of the feminine which dictates how this empire should conduct itself.

And although the Jews still remained subjects of the Persian Empire, the Purim miracle

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

serves as the catalyst in exile for the unleashing of the ultimate Redemption when we will see the fulfillment of King Solomon's declaration, "A woman of valor is the crown of her husband" through the feminine quality which will unleash the full revelation of the infinite Messianic G-dly light.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE PREEMINENCE OF WOMEN

Men and women both possess an inner fountain of faith.
Women, however, were blessed with fewer obstructions to
their inner faith and love for G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE PREEMINENCE OF WOMEN

Debunking the Patriarchy theory

When the Jewish people were commanded to contribute to the building of the *Mishkan*—the portable Sanctuary, the Torah relates that the women were most eager to contribute their jewelry. This was in stark contrast to their response to the collection of jewelry for the construction of the Golden Calf. There, our Sages tell us, the women absolutely refused to participate. The men had to give their own jewelry for that sinful cause.

What was it about the women that inspired them to contribute to the *Mishkan*, when they would absolutely have no share in the other “communal” project, the construction of the Golden Calf?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

If there is anything we can learn from this experience is that contrary to the modern “scholarly” view, Judaism was never just a patriarchy, where men dominated all. If that were the case, it is unfathomable that virtually an entire nation of men participated in or acquiesced to the construction and worship of the Golden Calf, whereas all of the women demurred!

It is thus obvious that the women were in control of their own spiritual destinies. Whatever power the men may have exercised over the women, it did not extend itself to what they considered to be the primary arena of life—their Jewish and spiritual commitments.

The feminine mystique

But, this simply begs an obvious question. Why were the women capable of resisting the temptation to follow the men in their involvement with the Golden Calf? And why were they the ones to lead with the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

contributions of their valuables to the *Mishkan*?

Chassidic thought explains this phenomenon with the premise that everyone possesses an innate sense of faith in G-d. As a result of this internal reservoir of faith, one would never desire to do anything that can sever his or her connection to G-d.

Yet, this deep-rooted faith and conviction can be—and is usually—obscured by the outer layers of our personalities. People who are more philosophically inclined, for example, have a more difficult time to express a faith that is simple and pure. Their very temperament compels them to seek a logical explanation for and philosophize about everything. There can also be other personality traits, such as unbridled temptations that serve as impediments to one's inner faith. In the pursuit of what may be morally repugnant, the human mind will work overtime finding some rationalization for that behavior.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Frequently it takes a crisis situation to jolt people into realizing that they really have this faith deep within them.

While both men and women possess this inner well of faith, women, by nature, Chassidic thought teaches us, are more capable of **expressing** their internal feelings of faith. That which obscures faith is not as potent in women as it is in men.

Hence, when the women were confronted with an opportunity to contribute to a Golden Calf, they immediately recognized that it was incongruous with their faith in G-d and in His commandment to them not to have any other gods. Owing to their nature, the men, were able to construct rationalizations that obfuscated the awareness of how their actions were totally incompatible with their own faith in G-d.

Conversely, when the women were approached to contribute to the *Mishkan*, no feelings of attachment to one's own jewelry could deter them from translating their faith into the act of building a Sanctuary for G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The unique role of women in the pre-Messianic Age

The Messianic Age has been identified by the Kabbalists as the age of “spiritual femininity.” This means that the qualities that are associated with femininity will extend to the entire world. Even men will be capable of removing the outer layers of their personalities—without losing their masculine qualities—and allow their inner spirituality and attachment to G-d shine through them.

In other words, the Messianic Age will not destroy the spiritual qualities that are associated with masculinity; it will only eliminate the spiritual roadblock that obscures one’s inner faith that is associated with the masculine.

Our Sages inform us that the Exodus from Egypt came as a result of the faith of the women of that generation. Our Sages also state that the future Redemption will also be in the merit of the righteous women of this generation. It is the unique ability possessed by women to express their innermost feelings

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

that opens the way for the liberation of the entire world and to usher in an Age that will “liberate” all of our soul’s most profound aspirations that have heretofore been concealed and obstructed.

In Jewish thought—particularly as it has been illuminated by the teachings of Chassidus—women are the forces of liberation!

ESSAY FOURTEEN

SMOKE ALARM

Existence is a union between space, time and energy.

The acronym for these three components is *ashan*-smoke.

Mount Sinai was engulfed in smoke.

The purpose of Torah was to clear away the smoke that obscures the Divinity within space, time and energy.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FOURTEEN

SMOKE ALARM

Where there is smoke there is fire

This week's Torah portion *Vayakhel* commences with the narrative of how Moses gathered all the Jews to convey to them the instructions he had received concerning the observance of the Sabbath and construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert. According to Rashi, this occurred the day after he returned from Sinai with the second set of Tablets.

To understand why Moses' return from Sinai commenced with his gathering of all the Jews to discuss with them the themes of Shabbos and the Sanctuary and to better appreciate the dynamics of this historic event, the following introduction is in order.

Sefer Yetzirah, one of the oldest works of Kabbalah, states that all of existence can be

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

divided into the three dimensions of: *Olam*-world, *shanah*-year and *nefesh*-soul. Translated into more contemporary language this means that everything is either in the realm of space, time or consciousness.

The acronym of these three Hebrew words, *olam*, *shanah* and *nefesh* is *oshan*, which means smoke. The implication of this is that all of the components of existence contain a paradoxical feature. On the one hand, “where there is smoke there is fire,” as the saying goes. The components of existence reflect the Divine energy that is likened to fire. When one looks at the grandeur of the universe, the enigma of time, and the majesty of the soul, one cannot help but to see the Divine presence. On the other hand, smoke is a metaphor for obscuring and concealing, as the expression “smoke-screen” implies. We can look at the universe and fail to see G-d’s hand and presence.

Thus, when G-d descended on Mount Sinai to give the Torah, the mountain was engulfed in *ashan*-smoke. This imagery was intended to convey the message that the very objective

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

of Sinai was to enable the world to see through the smoke. When we perform a mitzvah with an object that occupies space, or that is limited to a specific location, the realm of space becomes a medium that reflects the Divine. G-d who transcends the parameters of space and who simultaneously “resides” within that space.

When we observe the Shabbos and Holidays or other time related Mitzvos, time itself becomes sanctified. The limiting nature of time then reflects the timelessness of G-d.

When we invest our consciousness in the performance of a Mitzvah, it removes the soul’s inhibitions and empowers it with the infinite nature of G-d. Our finite being becomes a sanctuary for G-d’s infinite consciousness.

Where Consciousness, Time and Space Converged

When all the Jews united under the direction of Moses, the most super-conscious person to have ever lived, the **full** potential of their

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

consciousness was realized. The sheer power of Moses and the collective power of the Jewish nation, combined to unleash the most powerful state of consciousness.

Likewise, on Shabbos, the holiest day of the week, the potential of time is at its peak, because it is the day that comprises, unifies and allows us to tap into the spiritual energy of the other days of the week.

Similarly, the Sanctuary, the single most hallowed place in the realm of space, was where all of the spiritual energy of all of space converged. Thus when Moses gathered **all the Jews** to discuss the **Shabbos** and the instructions for the building of the **Sanctuary**, Moses sought to tap the most potent combined energies inherent in space, time and consciousness.

We can now appreciate why Moses' first call to action upon descending from Sinai was to gather all the Jews and instruct them concerning the Shabbos and the Sanctuary. As was stated, the very objective of Sinai is to remove the "smoke-screen" in all the three

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

areas of space, time and consciousness. This was accomplished by gathering all of them (unity in consciousness) and introducing them to the Shabbos (unity in time) and the Sanctuary (unity in space).

In truth, **whenever** Jews gather under the direction of an ideal Jewish leader in a synagogue or house of study, particularly in a holy time, we have the capacity to unleash the greatest spiritual potential.

Indeed, our Sages taught that Moses then instructed future Jewish leaders to gather Jews on the Shabbos for the study of Torah.

When we study Torah in a group setting, we unify all the diverse souls that participate in the class. The fact that it is during the Shabbos enables us to enjoy the cumulative energy of all components of time that is unleashed on the Shabbos.

When we study in a synagogue or in a House of Study, it unifies and reveals all the spirituality within the realm of space of that community. The cumulative force of group study in a synagogue on the Shabbos clears

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

away the smoke that clouds the world's spiritual potential.

Partly Cloudy?

In the present period of Galus-exile, the weather can always be described as mixed. While there is much sunlight that we can be thankful for, most of our day fits into the proverbial “partly cloudy” forecast. We often find it hard to see the fire in the smoke, because of the concealment of G-d's presence and energy.

All this will change in the Messianic Age. The change will be caused by or will be reflected in the realization of the ultimate union of all Jews in the *Bais Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem under the direction of the Moshiach.

The entire Messianic Age has also been described as the Sabbath of creation. All the three elements will then converge to form a threefold force that will generate the G-dly “fire” that will encompass all of existence

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

with its light and warmth, but, without the
smoke.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FIFTEEN

JEWISH PYROTECHNICS

There is an inner fire and an external fire.

**The external fire we use in the weekdays to destroy the
resistant forces of nature and convert them into spiritual
energy.**

**The internal fire is serene and warm. It is the fire of our
soul, of Torah.**

It is revealed particularly on Shabbos.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY FIFTEEN

JEWISH PYROTECHNICS

Don't light fires on the Sabbath

This week's Torah portion describes the way Moses gathered all the Jewish people for the purpose of delivering the instructions as to how they should build the *Mishkan*, the temporary and portable sanctuary the Jews had in the wilderness.

But, before he imparted the message about the construction of the *Mishkan*, Moses first exhorted them about not doing work on the Sabbath.

According to the Talmud, the Torah's juxtaposition of the Sabbath with the building of the *Mishkan*, teaches us that the definition of "work" in regard to the Sabbath are the 39 categories of labor that were instrumental in building the *Mishkan*.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

However, notwithstanding the fact that there are 39 categories of work (e.g. planting, cooking, building, weaving etc.), the only category of work mentioned here is the lighting of a fire.

Why Single out Lighting Fires?

The question has been raised. Why does the Torah single out the prohibition of lighting fires on the Sabbath? Why doesn't the Torah just say, "Do not do work on the Sabbath?" That would presumably include lighting fires as well.

One answer provided by *Rabeinu Bachaye* (14th century) is that all forms of work require fire. For example, one of the types of work that is banned on the Sabbath is plowing. To make a plow one must use fire. And so it is with all forms of work, whose instruments have to be created with fire.

This is why, *Rabeinu Bachaye* continues, we light a fire at the end of the Sabbath, during the *Havdalah* service. It is through fire that all forms of work are facilitated. By thanking

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

G-d for the creation of fire, we are in effect thanking Him for our ability to perform all of our work that commences at the end of the Shabbos.

The spiritual essence of fire

In addition to the foregoing simple explanation, there is also a more profound explanation as to the reason why the Torah singled out the prohibition against lighting a fire on the Shabbos.

What is the spiritual meaning of fire? And why is it so important to know that fire is the essence of all work? And if fire is so special, why are we commanded *not* to light a fire on the Shabbos?

Fire is energy that is created by combustion, the consuming of a physical substance. Throughout the week, we are obligated to take the mundane aspects of our lives and transform them into a more subtle and spiritual state of being. This is comparable to the piece of wood that turns into vapor, smoke and ashes, a far cry from the original

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

block of wood. This is the function of all of our work throughout the week. By investing fiery passion for G-d in our work, we can replicate the work of the *Mishkan*.

We can now appreciate why when the Mishkan was completed and dedicated, the Torah tells us that G-d expressed his satisfaction with the efforts of the Jewish nation by sending a fire that consumed the sacrifices. G-d was, in effect, saying that their work was “well done” (pun intended).

The serene inner fire of Shabbos and Moshiach

Despite the importance of the fire metaphor, there is a need to rise above it on the Shabbos. The process of refining the physical world around us has its place six days a week. On the seventh day, we desist from creating fires that consume, because on the Shabbos we rise to a higher level of service to G-d. On the Shabbos we have an inner fire that burns. This fire is peaceful and serene.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The difference between the weekdays and the Shabbos are a reflection of the contrast between the way we serve G-d in the pre-Messianic Age and the way it will be in the future.

In the days of exile, the fire of our souls is needed to change the world. The fire that we kindle is constructive by being destructive. We remove the coarseness of the material world and make the world a holier place.

In the future Messianic Age, the world will have already been refined sufficiently. We will then no longer need to kindle fires. The only fire that will exist will be the internal flame of our soul and of our Torah. Fire will be used not for its destructive powers, but for the light it will generate.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SIXTEEN

WHEN COUNTING COUNTS

We count material items.

But we deeply value spiritual experiences.

**The best of both worlds will be when we will
have a spiritual experience even as we count
our physical objects.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SIXTEEN

WHEN COUNTING COUNTS

The Parsha of Accounting

This week's Torah reading combines two Parshiyos, both of which deal with the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert. After discussing the instructions Moses received from G-d in three of the preceding Torah portions, the Torah recounts how Moses delivered the message to the Jewish people as to what and how they should build this Sanctuary.

More specifically, the first of this week's "twin" parsha, entitled VaYakhel discusses the actual contributions to and the construction of the Mishkan. The second parsha entitled Pikkudei discusses the accounting of the materials used in its construction as well as

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the making of the priestly garments and the final assembly of the Mishkan.

The name “Pikkudei” means “accounts” and it is taken from the opening verse:

“These are the **accounts** of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted on Moses’ command...”

There is a Talmudic rule that whenever the Torah employs the restrictive term “these” it is intended to exclude other things that might otherwise have been included. In the context of this week’s parsha the Torah seems to be telling us: “These are the accounts,” as if to say that only with respect to the Mishkan is accounting appropriate.

This understanding of the text, of course, begs the question: Generally speaking, isn’t making an accounting of one’s activities and resources a good and holy endeavor? Why would the Torah want to restrict it to the construction of the Mishkan?

Rabbi Chaim ben Attar—the classic 18th century Sephardic commentator known for

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

synthesizing all four levels of Torah interpretation in his classic commentary *Or Hachaim*—focuses on the opening word of the parsha: “These” and provides several explanation as to the meaning of this word; the first of which follows below with commentary.

Or HaChaim explains that, in fact, all of the world’s material acquisitions cannot truly be counted. There is nothing in the world, other than the Sanctuary, which served as the wondrous dwelling of the Eternal G-d can be counted.

On the surface this approach seems difficult to understand and is counterintuitive. Isn’t counting a process that applies particularly to something material? By way of analogy: One can count coins but one cannot count love or logic. The more abstract something is the less we can apply the concept of counting. Only material things are quantifiable. How do we then explain the premise of the *Or HaChaim* that counting applies only to something spiritual as the Sanctuary?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Why Count?

To resolve this matter one must understand the significance of counting. When we count something it suggests two things:

First, for something to be counted the thing that we count must possess some real value; it must be authentic. Things that have no value are not counted.

In addition the idea of counting suggests that there is a link between the items that are counted; there is some element that unites them.

If we reflect on the real definition of counting and apply it to material matters we will discover that the term counting is not precise.

Counting Implies Value and Unity

First, material matters, no matter how precious, have no intrinsic value.

Consider, for example, gold and diamonds that we regard as having great value. If the streets would be paved with them would they

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

be worth counting? If money would grow on trees, would anyone count his money and place it in a bank for safekeeping? Just as we do not count the grains of sand on the beach we would not count money and other material commodities whose value is predicated on their scarcity.

We can now appreciate why material matters only count when they become instruments of things that have enduring value, such as the building of the Sanctuary.

Similarly, when we use our material resources to construct our own homes and institutions so that they too serve as a “dwelling place” for G-d, they then acquire value and can be counted.

Moreover, as stated, there must be a link between things that are counted. Physical matters, by nature, are fragmented and are distinct from one another; any union between them is merely temporary and tenuous. By contrast, the spiritual realm is characterized by cohesion and organic unity.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Thus, the Torah teaches us that to be able to truly count all of our material goods and possessions they must be dedicated to the cause of building a world that will be a Sanctuary for G-d. Once the physical world realizes the purpose for which it was created its intrinsic value surfaces and renders it something eminently “countable.”

Counting to the Future

The word Pikudei is also related to the word remembrance that the Torah uses to describe the way G-d will remember the Jewish people and take them out of exile. It follows then that the concept of counting can only be fully expressed when one is in a state of liberation.

As long as we are in exile, our ability to appreciate the true value of the physical aspects of our lives and utilize them for the creation of a Sanctuary for G-d is limited. Only after the final Redemption through Moshiach will we truly be able to count everything in our lives.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Messianic Age Myth

To understand the connection between counting and the Redemption it is important to dispel a myth regarding the Messianic Age:

The myth is that all of life will be so different that nothing of our past will remain. The world will be unrecognizable. That is patently false!

The truth is that with the coming of Moshiach many things will change even as they remain the same. All of the material things we have today will be around in the Messianic Age as well. All of the positive activities that we engage in now will continue then.

The difference between material things now and then is that now they cannot be counted—in the full sense of the word—because we do not presently appreciate their true intrinsic value. Because of the constraining forces of exile we only see the ephemeral aspects of the material world but not its inner ethereal nature.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

So, while the physical world will not change in the future Age of Redemption, everything will begin to acquire greater value and really count because then the entire world—including our worldly possessions—will express G-d's presence in this world.

As stated, this premise goes contrary to conventional wisdom that the Messianic Age will bring an end to the world the way we know it; that we will no longer have the material possessions that we have today. In this mindset, the physical world is a contradiction and an impediment to the spiritual world and way of life.

In truth, this approach actually minimizes the true accomplishments that we will experience in the future Redemption.

Remain the Same and Change

Judaism—as articulated by Maimonides and illuminated by Chassidic thought—believes that all of the physical world will remain the same. What **will** change is our perception of the physical and the way we relate to it.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Instead of viewing the physical world in the narrowest of ways, we will see its full G-dly power that is no less G-dly than the spiritual. Instead of viewing the physical as a creation that has only secondary or tertiary value relative to the spiritual domain; in the Messianic age we will see how all of physicality will be endowed with profound meaning and depth that is no less G-dly than the spiritual.

Provided with this new perspective on the status of the physical, we will also see the cohesiveness and the inherent unity that pervades the entire universe.

Everything around us will then begin to truly count.

Fusion of the Spiritual and Physical

Spirituality cannot be counted because it is not quantifiable. Material things, as we perceive them, do not count because they possess no intrinsic value. What does count? Physical things, when their true inner dimension is revealed.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In practical terms this means: when we utilize the material possessions for the creation of a Mishkan/Sanctuary for G-d in our own homes by, for example, affixing a Mezuzah to the doorposts of our homes, having a kosher kitchen, practicing hospitality, observing the Shabbos and Holidays, creating a Jewish atmosphere for our children, and living in peace and harmony —then we can count our blessings.

**ESSAY SEVENTEEN
THE COMPLETED BAIS
HAMIKDASH**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE COMPLETED BAIS HAMIKDASH

Job Well Done

The book of Exodus ends with the completion of the Mishkan (Tabernacle, the portable Sanctuary in the desert). The efforts of the Jewish people are summed up:

“All the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting was completed. The children of Israel had done everything that G-d had commanded Moses, so had they done!”

Two questions have been raised concerning this verse:

First, the statement that “the children of Israel did everything that G-d had commanded Moses” is quite clear. Why then does the Torah have to repeat itself by stating: “so had they done?”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Second, why does the Torah have to emphasize that they did everything? Wouldn't it have sufficed to say that they followed Moses' instructions? What construction detail would we have thought they could have left out?

Allusion to the Bais Hamikdash

The great Sephardic Sage and Kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim Palachi (1788-1869, of Izmir, Turkey), in his work *R'ei Chaim*, explains that this verse is a hint to the third and final Bais Hamikdash-Holy Temple.

According to the Midrash, cited by Rashi in his commentary on the Talmud, the third Bais Hamikdash already exists, fully constructed, in the heavens and will descend at the time of the future Redemption.

Why then has the Temple not yet descended, if it is already complete? Rabbi Chaim Palachi answers: it is waiting for us to do our part, through Teshuvah and good deeds.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

This, he writes, is the message in the words ““All the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting was completed.” It refers to the future Holy Temple. Mishkan (Tabernacle) and Mikdash (Temple), the Talmud states (*Eiruv* 2a), are used interchangeably in the Torah. Hence, the reference to the completion of the Mishkan alludes to the completion of the Final Temple. The fact that the Torah uses the past tense indicates that even the final Temple has already been completed.

The Torah continues on, to supply the answer to the question, when will it appear?

“The children of Israel had done everything that G-d had commanded Moses.”

When we will have done “**everything** that G-d had commanded Moses,” not just the actual instructions concerning the Mishkan, but all of the commandments imparted to us by Moses, then the third Holy Temple will descend.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

While this ingenious reinterpretation of the verse answers the question “why,” it adds the word “everything” to incorporate all of the commandments, so we still have not answered the question why the Torah seemingly repeats itself with the words “so had they done.”

Two Scenarios

To answer this question it is important for us to understand why there are two versions of how the third Bais Hamikdash will be built:

As stated, Rashi maintains that the Bais Hamikdash will descend from above, fully constructed.

Rambam (based on the Jerusalem Talmud and other Midrashic sources), however, rules that Moshiach will build the Bais Hamikdash. This does not mean that he will build it singlehandedly. Rather, it will be built by the Jewish people under Moshiach’s direction. The Rambam, therefore, included the laws of the Temple’s construction in his Mishneh Torah, so that when Moshiach receives the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

signal from Above to build it, we will be familiar with the laws concerning its construction.

How do we reconcile these two views? Either G-d has already built the Bais Hamikdash or we will be the ones to build it. How can it be both ways?

The Rebbe provided several approaches to reconciling these two scenarios. One approach is that it will depend on the manner in which the Redemption occurs. If we are meritorious and the Redemption occurs because of our virtuous behavior it will be a miraculous Redemption and a miraculous Temple will descend from above. If, however, our efforts fall short of the mark and we are not sufficiently refined and meritorious, we will have to build it ourselves.

Moreover, the Rebbe adds: After we build it ourselves, under the direction of Moshiach, the heavenly Temple will descend from above and merge itself into our physical Temple. This development will come about because

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

after the Temple is built our level of worthiness will also change for the better.

Is it Physical or Spiritual?

To better comprehend the two scenarios let us try to understand what it means when the Sages say that the third Temple is already built. What is the nature of its construction? Is it a spiritual structure? Or is it actually a physical structure that is currently hidden from our view? Also, we must understand how it was constructed?

The answers hinge on a better understanding of the dynamic of a Mitzvah and how its performance leads to the Bais Hamikdash.

Whenever we perform a Mitzvah, we generate a G-dly energy that contributes to the construction of the third Bais Hamikdash. When the world has accumulated a sufficient number of Mitzvos the Bais Hamikdash reaches its state of completion. This Bais Hamikdash enjoys the same twinned dynamic of a Mitzvah. A Mitzvah is both spiritual and physical; it generates a spiritual energy by

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

way of the performance of a physical act that fuses the two worlds together. Thus, the definition of Bais Hamikdash is a physical structure that fully and unambiguously reflects divine energy.

The Decree

The Mitzvah-Bais Hamikdash dynamic is a reversal of the way the world existed in its initial stages.

When G-d created the world, He created two parallel dimensions of existence; a host of spiritual worlds and a physical world, the one we inhabit. At the time of creation, however, a “decree” was issued that the two worlds would remain parallel lines that never meet. In the words of the Psalmist: “The heavens are G-d’s heavens, but the earth He gave to the children of man.” The very word for “decree” in Hebrew is *gezeirah*, which also means “severance.” G-d severed what should have been a natural partnership.

Before Sinai, one’s spiritual efforts could not have an impact on the physical world. The

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

concept of holiness in the physical realm did not yet exist.

This all changed at Sinai. The decree of separation was rescinded and G-d enabled us to fuse the parallel dimensions into a seamless unit. Whenever we perform a Mitzvah, which invariably involves physical objects and a physical body, we cause the spiritual to manifest itself within the physical.

In their aggregate, Mitzvah performances create a physical entity that is totally and manifestly reflective of the most sublime spiritual and G-dly light. That is what we mean when we say that the third Temple is already fully built. It is not about the difference between a spiritual Temple or a physical one. It is about the physical and the spiritual as they are organically and seamlessly one. It will be a place where absolutely no trace of separation between the two realms will exist and from there it will reveal G-d's presence in the entire world.

However, while this Bais Hamikdash has long been completed due to the cumulative energy

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

of all the Mitzvos we as a people have done for thousands of years it has yet to “descend,” i.e., materialize before our eyes of flesh. Why?

The answer is that while our collective efforts throughout the ages are sufficient to have created this unique structure, our generation has to do its part to reflect the unification of the dichotomous existences. While our challenge is to do more Mitzvos it is also about living a unified life.

Indeed, the Rebbe exhorted us on many occasions not to see Torah and the material world as disparate and conflicting entities. The Rebbe conditioned us to see that our physical existence is an extension of our Mitzvah observance. If we have a problem, we check our Mezuzos, to cite an example, but not because of we believe that a Mezuzah has some kind of magical power. Rather we check our Mezuzos in recognition that our physical lives are completely integrated with our spiritual lives. It is the most natural thing to link Mitzvah observance to every facet of our lives.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

To the extent that we remove all the barriers in our perception of the physical and spiritual as unified dynamics we will have made the emergence of the third Bais Hamikdash our reality. Even if we are not ready, our building of the third Bais Hamikdash under the direction of Moshiach will catapult us into that mindset and we will then see the descent of the heavenly third Temple.

Changing G-d's words to "*So it was*"

We can now answer the question posed above, why the Torah adds the words "so had they done." If the first part of the verse alludes to how our compliance with all of the commandments builds the heavenly Bais Hamikdash, the final words, "so had they done," clarifies two points:

First, the cumulative efforts of all past generations must be followed by our following in their footsteps. We must do our part in living a non-dichotomous life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Second, the word in Hebrew for “so” is “*kain*.” When G-d created the world, He said for each day of creation, “let there be... and it was **so**.” There was one exception. On day one G-d said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” It does not say “and it was so,” because the light that emerged was not the identical light that was intended. There was a dichotomy. Not until Sinai did we receive the potential power to reverse that inconsistency. And not until the generation of Redemption will we finally bring that potential to fruition, when there will no longer be any dichotomy between G-ds’s ideals for this world and the way the world behaves.

Thus, the Torah states: “All the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting was completed. The children of Israel had done everything that G-d had commanded Moses, so had they done!”

Based on the above it tells us:

The third Bais Hamikdash is already complete because all the Mitzvos we have done

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

throughout the ages have long reached critical mass. All that we need now is to finish our task by revealing the power of “*kain-so*,” the power of removing the dichotomy between the physical and spiritual so that the spiritual Temple materializes before our very eyes. May we see that happen now!

**ESSAY EIGHTEEN
PRIME SUSPECT!**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

PRIME SUSPECT!

The Accounting

The second portion of this week's double parsha, Pikudei, is a detailed accounting for all of the components of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary constructed by the Jews in the desert. According to the Midrash, some of the people were suspicious of Moses, thinking that he may have misappropriated some of the funds. The Torah, therefore, takes great pains to show that there was no impropriety in the collection and use of the contributions to the Mishkan.

Rabbi Meir Shapiro, one of the leaders of Polish Jewry before the Second World War, makes an astute observation: When the Jews contributed vast amounts of gold for the construction of the golden calf, we find no record of people complaining that their gold

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

was being misappropriated by the leaders of that effort. The contrast between the golden calf and the Mishkan is even more glaring considering the amounts of gold that were used for both and the finished product. From all of the gold collected for the golden calf, only one little calf emerged! Yet no one complained. No murmuring was heard from the contributors. However, when the contributions to the Mishkan building fund yielded a magnificent structure, they murmured! How strange!

The question of why this was so is sharpened when we realize that Moses was the most humble and selfless leader, who did so much good for the people. In stark contrast, what did the makers of the golden calf do for anyone? They were rabble rousers, from the lowest class of society. Indeed, our Sages tell us that the instigators of the golden calf debacle were the “Eirev rav” - the multitude of nations that joined the Jewish people only because they witnessed the miraculous deliverance of the Jews from the hands of Pharaoh. Their “conversion” was not sincere

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

and they never relinquished their idolatrous ways.

Yet when they illegally collected enormous amounts of gold for this dubious —to put it mildly— project, no one seemed to care whether the funds were administered with integrity. How bizarre!

An Enigma

Rabbi Meir Shapiro does not offer any rational explanation for this phenomenon. He merely characterized it as an enigma.

There is, however, a need to understand the psychology behind this phenomenon.

In order to facilitate free choice, so that **we choose** to do good and reject evil, we are not able immediately and clearly to see the positive effects of our Mitzvos or the deleterious results of our transgressions. If we were able to see the infinite positive energy generated by each and every Mitzvah we perform, how could we desist from doing that Mitzvah? Even if the Mitzvah requires

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

some measure of effort and expense, why would we not unhesitatingly do the Mitzvah? Failure to perform the Mitzvah because it would be costly in time, money and energy would be comparable to a person who foolishly refuses to accept a million dollars because he must first make a one dollar investment!

Similarly, if we knew the horrible consequences of our transgressions in advance, how could we succumb to the sin for its ephemeral rewards when we know the magnitude of our ultimate loss? Again, this is comparable to a person who knowingly agrees to forfeit his entire fortune for the immediate payment of a paltry sum of money.

Creating Balance

To allow for free choice, G-d “had” to create a balance by suppressing the feelings of gain for the observance of the Mitzvos and loss for their transgression. This G-d accomplished by magnifying the appeal of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

forbidden behaviors and dulling the sensation of joy that accompanies the performance of a Mitzvah. Indeed, the dulling pressure even can go so far as to sow doubt of the benefits of performing the Mitzvos and on their very Divine origin.

When history's most important project was undertaken (construction of the Mishkan, which concretized the revelation at Mount Sinai) under the leadership of history's most righteous and holy person (Moses), its holiness was so powerful that there would have been a drastic imbalance in favor of the realm of holiness. If left undiminished, that imbalance would have precluded free choice.

Similarly, immediately after the Torah was given, which introduced G-d's presence in this physical world in an unprecedented fashion, no human being—certainly not the Jewish people who witnessed the revelation—could possibly do anything contrary to G-d's will.

To create a balance, G-d allowed for a parallel force of concealment that manifested

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

itself in an irrational attraction to idol worship. The attraction was so magnified and intense that they were able to construct the golden calf just forty short days after hearing G-d's explicit command, "Do not have any other gods in My presence." The unnatural pressure to do just that was a necessary counterweight to the natural pressure to do only that which G-d wanted.

Will the Real I Stand Up?

In other words, whereas the true nature of a Jew is to do G-d's commandments and desist from going against G-d's will, G-d superimposed an outside influence that can mask the Jew's true inner G-dly nature. The true "I" is the one that feels its connection to G-d and all that is G-dly.

This explains the enigmatic words of Maimonides in his discussion of a recalcitrant husband who refuses to grant his wife a Jewish divorce (*Get*). Since a *get* must be given willingly, Jewish courts may actually coerce the husband into saying "I agree."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Maimonides' addresses the apparent inconsistency of the law. If a *get* requires the husband's consent, what good is the coerced declaration of "I agree?"

Maimonides answer is that the inner desire of the Jew is to comply with the laws of the Torah. It is only his evil impulse that exerts pressure on him to not comply. Thus, when the husband says, "I agree"—albeit, under duress—that is, in fact, his true inner desire.

This also explains the statement in the Talmud, "Even the sinners of Israel are filled with Mitzvos as a pomegranate is filled with seeds." The Rebbe once asked, if the sinner is so **filled** with Mitzvos, where is there room for his transgressions? The answer is: on the outside. Transgression is not the natural state of the Jew; it is peripheral and super-imposed.

Skin Deep

However, human nature responds strongly to the external. We are attracted to that which our eyes can see. We must be "compelled" or

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

prodded to look beneath the surface and discover our innate pre-disposition to doing good. Holiness runs in us as deep as the deepest chasms of the ocean, but all we can see is its surface gleam, the external temptations of the material world.

To summarize: Life is about balancing the obvious and powerful external pressures that stare us in the face against the profound deeper influences that one only finds through searching. The external, although skin deep, is in our face. The internal, while deep and potent, requires effort to recognize and harness.

This explains the enigma of the people turning to the golden calf only forty days after experiencing the greatest revelation of G-d in this world. It also explains why some people could have suspected Moses, of all people, with misusing the funds dedicated for the Mishkan. Precisely because these were such profound and spiritually deep experiences, and since Moses was the most G-dly person to have lived, the external opposition had to be powerfully strident.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The Façade is About to Disappear

That paradoxical dynamic of peripheral evil versus internal spirituality has reached its peak in the present day and age. The lesson we can derive from our experience at Sinai is heartwarming and reassuring in this moment of time.

From Sinai onward, we have been accumulating G-dly light and storing it in our soul's subterranean ocean. The evil of the past has long dissipated, either through repentance or through suffering, with its cathartic power. So, if the good is a vast ocean and the evil a mere trickle, why do we see so much of evil in today's world? Why are there so many challenges posed by modernity? Why is the transgressive secular influence so pervasive?

The answer is that in our final thrust into the period of Geulah-Redemption, it is still "necessary" to strike a balance. To offset the imposing surge of internal spiritual energy, there is a need for a corresponding external force. In many ways, the challenge today is

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

greater than any time previously. Our task now is to see these threats to our spiritual existence as false challenges and for us to recognize that they are not reality. These temptations do not represent the true nature of our world; deep down the world has become saturated with the G-dly energy generated by millennia of Mitzvah observance, notwithstanding all of the hardships it entailed.

Upon even deeper reflection, it becomes evident that our generation possesses infinitely more spiritual energy than any other in history. This is so because we have the accumulated energy of all the preceding generations. And these G-dly forces are now pushing up against the allure and façade of materialism, poised to break through to the surface and eliminate its illusive sheen.

In addition, we have to recognize that no matter how far we may think we are from the dictates of the Torah, that external self-identity belies our true inner G-dly nature.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Our task now is to “open our eyes” to see beneath the surface and recognize that Moshiach and Redemption are right before us, even if **we** may not presently recognize it. Moshiach’s task is not so much to innovate but to inspire and empower us to accept the reality of our personal as well as collective existence.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY NINETEEN
**THE STATE OF OUR
UNION IS STRONG!**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE STATE OF OUR UNION IS STRONG!

Upward Mobility

One of the principles of Jewish law is: “we ascend in matters of holiness and not descend.”

This principle conveys a dual message: First we must always look for ways to enhance our spiritual lives and commitment to Torah and Mitzvos, and, at the least we should not decline in matters of holiness.

The most popular example of this principle comes from our celebration of Chanukah. We follow the School of Hillel’s opinion that we should light the Chanukah candles in ascending order, adding another light each night. This is in opposition to the view of the School of Shammai, who say we should start with eight candles and kindle descending numbers on successive nights.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Another example of the lesson of ascending is the law that we should first adorn ourselves with the Talis and then ascend to a higher by putting on the Tefillin, which possess a greater measure of holiness.

The Biblical source for the second part of the principle, that we may not descend, is derived from this week's parsha:

“Moses set up the Tabernacle, positioned its sockets, put up its beams, put in its bolts, and set up its pillars.”

Rashi, in his commentary to the Talmud (*Menachos* 99b), explains that this verse makes it clear that Moses set up the entire Tabernacle by himself. He did not delegate any of these activities to the Kohanim, because that would have resulted in a decline in stature of the one who erected the Tabernacle. No one could compare to Moses, and once Moses was engaged in its construction he could not allow anyone of an inferior rank to participate.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The Anomaly of the Jewish Month

The principle of always ascending and not descending in matters of holiness raises a fundamental question about the very structure of the Jewish calendar and its metaphorical application to the Jewish people.

The Jewish calendar follows the lunar cycle, during which the moon waxes and wanes. The beginning point of a Hebrew month is known as Rosh Chodesh. That is when the moon is born and barely visible. The moon's visibility increases night by night, waxing until the fifteenth of the month, when it begins to wane.

The question this poses is twofold:

First, how, in light (no pun intended) of the Jewish value of increasing light and not diminishing it, can we have a system which highlights (sorry: again no pun intended) the diminution of light?

The question concerns not only the moon but also the Jewish people who follow the lunar calendar because, as the Midrash states,

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

we are like the moon with our ups and downs. How are we to understand the lesson of a continually waning moon when we ought to be internalizing a message of constant growth and ascendance instead?

Second, why do we count **all** the days of the month in their ascending order? Shouldn't the days after the full moon, i.e., day 16 and beyond, be referred to again as days 14, 13 etc., which would reflect their true status as diminished days?

The Rebbe's answer to these two questions (*Likkutei Sichos* Volume 34 p. 48-50 and *Sefer Hasichos* 5752 Volume 1, p. 155) conveys an important message to us, specifically for these times of, arguably, spiritual decline.

Decreased Light with Enhanced Humility

The Rebbe based his answer on the Talmudic account of G-d's "dialogue" with the moon (*Chullin* 60b). Initially, G-d made the moon and sun equal. The moon complained that it was untenable to have two equal luminaries.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

G-d responded by telling the moon to diminish itself.

This, the Rebbe explains, is the message of the waning moon. Contrary to the understanding that the second half of the month, with its diminishing moon, is a sign of diminished spirituality; it is actually a time of increased humility and self-abnegation. The waning of the moon does not mean that we decrease in all of the other positive areas of growth. It suggests that, precisely when we reach our peak of perfection and become a “full moon,” we are in need of the second half of the month with its message of humility.

Less Light; More Essence

The Rebbe takes this a step further:

The difference between the growth in the first half of the month and growth in the second half is that as moon waxes, it casts an incremental increase of **light**. Our personalities shine. In the second half of the month, as the moon wanes, we draw closer to the source of the light.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In the astronomical sense, while the moon is waxing, it is farther away from the sun, whose light it reflects. In the second half of the month, however, the reason for the diminished light is that the moon actually is moving closer to the light's source, the sun. In the first half of the cycle we have more sunlight; in the second half we have more sun!

The analogue here is that in the first half of the month we, who are compared to the moon, grow in terms of reflecting G-dly light. As the Psalmist teaches us, G-d is "likened," as it were, to the sun (Psalm 84:12). In the second half of the month, because of our enhanced humility and submission to G-d, we become closer to the Luminary itself.

The Heels of Moshiach

The above analysis reflects the history of the Jewish people itself. When we look at the state of the Jewish nation today, it may appear that we are spiraling downward. Spiritually speaking, we appear to be in the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

second half of the lunar month with its diminishing light.

Indeed, this perception seems to be supported by our Sages, who refer to the period prior to the coming of Moshiach as the “Heels of Moshiach.” One meaning of this phrase is that all of history can be compared to the human body. If Moses and his generation are regarded as the “heads” of Jewish history, closest to the heavens, then we are regarded as its heels, closest to the earth.

However, while that assessment is valid, it is only true in regard to the amount of spiritual light. In terms of our closeness to the Divine Source of the light, the reverse is true. The diminished light we experience is a direct consequence of our approaching the final stretch of Galus-exile and our ultimate union with G-d. We are at the point where our closeness to G-d is more pronounced than ever. To borrow a traditional statement made by presidents in their State of the Union addresses: “The state of our **union** is strong.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Despite appearances to the contrary, we are drawing near the New Moon, with its message of total unity with G-d, even as we experience diminished light. We stand now on the threshold of the Messianic Age. It will be ushered in by Moshiach, at which time the moon's light will be restored to its original glory. In spiritual terms, it means that even as we get close to the Source and become one with G-d, the light will not be diminished. We will have our union and our light, too.

Remembering through Concealment

The very name of this week's parsha, Pikudei, alludes to the above. The root of the word Pikudei connotes both absence and remembrance; Galus-exile and Geulah-Redemption. In the Biblical book of Shmuel, we find the double expression: "You will be remembered (*v'nifkad'ta*) because your place will be missing (*yipaked*).” How can one word convey contradictory meanings?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The above analysis of the waning stage of the lunar cycle can explain the idea of remembrance caused by absence or concealment. As stated, the waning of the moon is not a negative sign but one that actually suggests greater closeness. Indeed, the root of the word Pikudei is also used by the Talmud to describe intimacy. The same term was used by the Torah to describe the Exodus from Egypt. This period of concealment is actually a prelude to the most intimate relationship we will have with G-d in the Messianic Age.

27th of Adar: Concealment and Closeness

The above message is particularly poignant at this time of the year. We read the parsha Pikudei every year around the 27th of Adar, when the Rebbe's physical condition denied us, temporarily, of our ability to hear and see him and bask in his light. To us, this period of concealment is extremely painful. However, the Rebbe's teaching concerning the second half of the lunar cycle provides us with a far

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

more optimistic perspective. While the Rebbe's light appears to have diminished, we are actually closer to his essence, which will lead us imminently to the time of Redemption, when we will be reunited.

One may find a hint to all of the above in a peculiar omission in many editions of the Torah. Most standard editions of the Torah list the number of verses at the end of each parsha, as well as a word or phrase that contains the same numerical value as the number of verses as a mnemonic. There is one notable exception. In all of these editions no number or mnemonic is mentioned for this week's parsha—Pikudei!

The Rebbe, in a letter, suggested that originally it may have stated: "92 verses, *bli kol siman*." Translated literally it could read, "92 verses without any mnemonic." A printer may have misconstrued this to mean that he should omit the number of verses because there was no mnemonic for it, when in actuality, the words "without any" **are themselves** the mnemonic.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Perhaps, there is a deeper significance to this mnemonic, *bli kol*. The word *kol* can mean “everything.” That is a term Rashi uses to describe a leader: “*haNassi hu hakol*—the leader is everything.” This suggests that all of the Jewish people are represented by and contained within the soul of an authentic Jewish leader.

Hence, the mnemonic “92 verses; *bli kol* is the mnemonic” can now be understood to suggest that when it appears that the leader’s light has diminished at the age of 92, that itself is the reminder (*Pikudei*) and provides us with the sign that he is here and we are even closer to him.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

**ESSAY TWENTY
COMPLETING THE
TASK**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY

COMPLETING THE TASK

Two objectives in life

“Our task is to invest effort while it is G-d’s task to make these efforts bear fruit,” goes a popular Jewish maxim. The implication of this is that we do not have to be goal oriented.

Rabbi *Tarphon’s* statement, in *Pirkei Avot*: “It is not your duty to compete the task, nor do you have the right to desist from it,” seems to echo this sentiment

On the other hand, this week’s Torah portion and *Haphtarah* that emphasize the completion of the task of the building of the Temples—seem to suggest otherwise.

In the words of a contemporary writer: “The good news is that it makes no difference where you start, because the bad news is that you have to do it all.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

To reconcile these two approaches, we must understand that Judaism discerns two distinct objectives in life.

Every detail counts

The first objective is for the Jew to realize that in every moment of the day, in every breath of life and in every place, there is a challenge. Whether or not one will do another good thing afterwards does not detract from the importance of **this** moment's challenge.

Every act, word or thought that one does for G-d has infinite importance. Even if one were to know with certainty that they will not be able to follow up their good deed with others, they should perform the one-time mitzvah with zeal and joy. As far as G-d is concerned, **every** mitzvah counts and every Mitzvah possesses infinite and cosmic power.

Maimonides in one of his famous letters explains how G-d rewards the solitary good deed of the most wicked and holds the most righteous accountable for the solitary

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

transgression. In Judaism every detail counts, because from the vantage point of a truly infinite G-d no action can be too small.

From this frame of reference it follows, that anytime we can influence a person to do one mitzvah, even if it would not be followed up by another one, we should. Every Mitzvah stands on its own and possesses intrinsic and infinite value.

Realizing the ultimate plan

But, there is also a second dimension to Judaism's view of life. G-d created the universe with a purpose and plan. According to our Talmudic Sages, this plan was for the world to become a "dwelling place for G-d;" a place where G-d feels at home. This objective is realized by the cumulative effect of all the Mitzvos that were performed by all generations going back to Sinai. Every Mitzvah we do that involves physical action and effects, adds one more "building block" to the palace we construct for G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

When a sufficient number of Mitzvos will have been performed, when there be will be “critical mass,” G-d’s presence will then be manifest in this physical world, and His purpose for creation will have been realized. This is the Messianic Age.

From this vantage point, our goal must be to complete the task. We must look to fulfill the purpose for which the world was created and cannot be satisfied with our accomplishments to date, no matter how significant they may be.

Throughout Jewish history, we were sensitive to both dimensions. We accentuated the importance of a solitary act and we, simultaneously, looked at our efforts in terms of the ultimate outcome. The closer we get to making G-d’s plan a reality, however, the more focused we become on the “goal” aspect of Judaism.

Because of our proximity to the Messianic Age, we can appreciate the increased emphasis given to the theme of Moshiach and the future Redemption by the greatest

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Jewish leaders in recent centuries, decades and years.

We can now also appreciate why the Book of Exodus concludes with the description of and emphasis on the **completion** of the *Mishkan*. The *Mishkan* within which G-d's presence was manifest, represented G-d's objective that all of the universe becomes a sanctuary for G-d. From the perspective of making the world into a dwelling place for G-d, one cannot be satisfied with a mere contribution to the goal, no matter how significant. The focus is indeed on completing the task.

This does not mean that we no longer treasure the solitary act of goodness. On the contrary, now, even the solitary act of goodness possesses even more significance than in the past. In the past, every act was viewed as an intrinsically holy and positive act. In the present pre-Messianic era, in addition to that perspective that still remains, every solitary act may very well be the final act that will complete the construction of the "*Mishkan*, the Palace of G-d" and bring about the fulfillment of G-d's Master Plan. That one

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

solitary act, to paraphrase Maimonides, can literally and permanently change the world for the good.

As we stand on the threshold of the Messianic Age, we should indeed be cognizant of our unique responsibility and privilege to be the ones who will actually put the finishing touches on the palace that we have been building for G-d for the last three thousand years.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

MOSES THE CPA

One of the ways of testing a person is through money.

Along with anger and wine, money can bring out the best
or the worst in people.

Money is not the root of all evil; it can be used for evil and
so can it be used for good.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

MOSES THE CPA

Beyond reproach

Upon concluding the description of the contributions made to the building of the Sanctuary in the desert (*Mishkan*), the Torah recounts in this week's parsha (*Pikudei*) how Moses gave an accounting of the materials that were used for the construction of the *Mishkan*.

Commentators grapple with the question as to why it was necessary for Moses to give this accounting.

The simple explanation given by our Sages is that anyone involved in handling communal funds must always be above reproach. Despite the fact that G-d testified about Moses that he was a most trustworthy

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

person—“In all of My house he is trustworthy” (Numbers 12:7)—nevertheless, we are commanded by the Torah to be above human reproach as well: “You shall be clean before G-d and before Israel.” (Numbers 32:22) In other words, not only must our behavior be proper so that G-d knows it; it must also be proper in the eyes of other people.

It is interesting to note that, etymologically, the English word money is said to derive from the Hebrew word *mamon*, which, in turn, derives from the word, *moneh*, which means to count. It is no coincidence that the name and theme of this week’s Parsha is *Pikudei*, which means “accounting.”

The same word for money *mamon*, is also etymologically related to the word *Emunah*, which means trust and faithfulness. Money is the commodity that requires integrity and which tests our trustworthiness, perhaps more than any other thing. Banks are called trusts because more than in any other profession, the single most important element in banking is trust. Even our

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

currency, by Divine Providence, carries the motto “In G-d we **trust**.”

Therefore, when the contributions for the *Mishkan* were made, Moses, in whose hands these contributions were entrusted, had to express this trust by making a precise accounting.

Accounting before the end

There is more to this story, however, than a simple lesson of Moses’ integrity. The Torah would not have devoted so much space to Moses’ accounting exercise to just teach us that we must be honest and above board in our financial dealings. After all, there are many commandments that make these demands explicitly. There must also be a deeper understanding of the Torah’s excursus concerning Moses’ accounting practice.

We can appreciate the Torah’s objective in this narrative by reflecting on the entire nature of the Book of Exodus. A close examination of its central themes of bondage, exodus, Sinai and the building of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Sanctuary will show that it parallels life itself. Our soul's entry into this world has been compared to the state of bondage because its spiritual capabilities are stifled. The soul can no longer feel G-d's presence. But ultimately the soul breaks out of this bondage by virtue of the observance of the Mitzvos, the Divine Commandments. Each Mitzvah enables the soul to express its true potential.

In the aggregate, our Mitzvos are designed to create a Sanctuary in our homes, communities and indeed, throughout the world, for the Divine presence.

As we approach the end of the Book of Exodus, we must look back and make an honest accounting as to whether we were successful in liberating all of our soul's potential qualities. Specifically, Moses' accounting concentrated on gold, silver and copper. These parallel the three general areas of human endeavor, intellect, emotion and action. While some might have succeeded in realizing their soul's intellectual capabilities, they might have neglected to actualize their soul's emotional and practical characteristics.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Others, conversely, might have acted admirably, but failed to activate and actualize their intellectual and emotional capabilities.

As we come to the end of our long stay in exile, it is now the time to survey our own achievements. We must ask ourselves, have we utilized all of our soul's incredible potential?

A follow up question would be, have we utilized all of our soul's qualities for the right purposes?

Our sages tell us, based on a verse in the Biblical book of Daniel, that before the coming of Moshiach, we will all discover our hidden potential. Now, as we approach the end of the process of the (book of) Exodus, we must follow Moses' example and take note of all of our resources and their proper use; for the purpose of building a Sanctuary for G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Organization is fundamental to learning and growth.

There are times when we are expected to pass-over the order; especially in these Messianic times.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Avoiding the detours to freedom

In this week's Parsha, *Pikudei*, the Torah describes how the portable Sanctuary in the desert, known as the *Mishkan*, was actually set up. Not only does it state what was done, but also the order in which things were done.

The obsession with doing things in their proper order is exemplified in the Passover evening service known as the *Seder*, which means order. Despite the fact that the Passover Seder is devoted to the theme of freedom, which often implies the lack of order, freedom in Judaism demands it. Every step in the Seder gets us closer to the realization of our goal of freedom. Deviation from the order may end up causing detours that actually frustrate our ambitions to be free.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Similarly, when it comes to constructing the Sanctuary, the physical one, as well as the spiritual one in our homes and hearts, one must not leave out any of the steps enumerated by the Torah. In addition, one must follow the order prescribed by the Torah. It would certainly not occur to one who purchases a machine, computer or any complex mechanism, to leave out some of the procedures, prescribed by the manufacturer for its functioning, or to alter the order in which these procedures should be performed.

Similarly, when we construct our internal Sanctuary, we must not overlook any of its details. Nor should we fail to follow the order in which these components are put together.

Out of order?

With this introduction in mind, we can appreciate the order in which Moses set up and furnished the Sanctuary. First Moses built the actual structure. Secondly he placed the Ark, the holiest part of the Sanctuary, in its innermost precinct. Following the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

placement of the Ark, Moses placed the Table, Menorah and Incense Altar inside the Sanctuary. Then he placed the Altar for sacrifices in the courtyard, outside of the Sanctuary. After he placed the Altar, he placed the *kiyor*, the laver—that was used by the priests to wash their hands and feet before performing the daily services in the Temple—in between the Sanctuary and the Altar.

Commentators raise the question, why the laver was placed out of order? All the other components of the Sanctuary seemed to have been placed in the order of their proximity to the Sanctuary: from the Ark in the innermost precinct of the Sanctuary to the curtain at the entrance of the courtyard. Why then was the laver—which was closer to the Sanctuary than the Altar—placed after the Altar, which was further removed from the Sanctuary?

To understand this anomaly we should reflect on the function of the laver and its relationship with the Altar. Before performing the service on the Altar, prior to getting closer to G-d (which is, after all, the simple

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

meaning of the Hebrew word for sacrifice-*Korban*: getting close) one must be sure to cleanse oneself from the undesirable influences and attitudes that one might harbor. Yet, we must realize that the goal of the process of spiritual cleansing is to get closer to G-d.

We must realize that the process of self-examination and purification, as important as it is, is nevertheless not the goal, just the means. And while it precedes the process of sanctification—thus the laver was placed closer to the sanctuary than the Altar—it is **not** the goal. The goal is to take the "outside" world and offer it to G-d, the function of the Altar.

Passover in the Mishkan

Thus, Moses placed the laver first, to underscore that the cleansing was only a prerequisite and prelude to, but not a substitute for, the process of getting close. Indeed, there are times that one must "Pass-over" the normal sequence and not wait for

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the cleansing process to be completed and begin by introducing oneself to holiness even before their purification process has been completed.

The *Seder*, which, as stated, means order, actually begins with a list of the activities of the evening. The first two items on the list, ironically, appear to be out of order! First it says, *kadesh*-sanctify and then *urchatz*-cleanse. Shouldn't we first have to cleanse ourselves and then sanctify ourselves?

Chassidic commentators explain that on the night of Passover, G-d "passes over" the conventional order of things and provides us with a new order, where we have the ability to realize holiness even before we have attained purification. This is analogous to the idea of placing the Altar first and only then mentioning the Laver: First sanctification and then purification.

Pass-over into the Age of Moshiach

As we approach the Holiday of Passover and as we await the imminent arrival of Moshiach

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

who will usher in a "new-world-order"—we should understand that at times we have to override the normal and conventional sequence of events, by reaching for the goal, even before we execute some of the standard prerequisites.

Whereas the exile mode dictates that we must conform to the proper order, the liberation mode demands that we change gears and Pass-over the normal order, even as we ask G-d to do the same, by liberating the world from its limitations. And while we must never shirk our obligations to cleanse ourselves, we must always keep our eyes on the goal of bringing Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

IN YOUR FACE

JUDAISM

Judaism encourages us to become public figures so we can maximize our influence over others.

Humility that leads to withdrawing from the public arena is a form of spiritual selfishness.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

IN YOUR FACE JUDAISM

Moses Gives Accounting

The parsha of Pikudei concludes the book of *Shemos*-Exodus. In Pikudei, Moses gives an accounting of all the materials that were contributed for the construction of the Mishkan (the portable Sanctuary in the desert).

The Midrash explains that although Moses' integrity was beyond reproach, nevertheless he wanted to give a complete accounting because of a principle mentioned later in the Torah: "You shall be innocent before G-d and Israel."

This is what Moses said to the two Tribes of Gad and Reuven when they asked to stay behind and get their inheritance in the east

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

bank of the Jordan. Moses rebuked them for sounding like the spies who did not want to cross over the Jordan. They responded that they were indeed planning to join their brethren in the conquest of the land, west of the Jordan, before they would take possession and settle their share on the east side.

Moses accepted their compromise and told them:

If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves for battle before G-d, and your army crosses the Jordan... and the land will be conquered before G-d – then afterwards you may return. You will be innocent in the eyes of G-d and of Israel.”

From this verse the Midrash derives the principle that just as one must be truthful to G-d so too one must not act in a way that will arouse suspicion from people. One must always act in a way that does not even give the appearance of impropriety.

If Moses – whom G-d said, and recorded it in the Torah for posterity, “Among My entire household he is trusted” – gave an

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

accounting to be above suspicion, how much more so should everyone else?

Why Should We Care If Others Suspect Us?

However, this raises an important question. If we know that we are doing the right thing, to the extent that G-d is satisfied with our integrity, why should we care what others think? Doesn't Judaism cherish what goes on between us and G-d? Don't we put on a pedestal one who serves G-d without fanfare and recognition? Haven't we read so many stories about the 36 **hidden** *tzadikim*, on whose merit the entire world stands?

There are several explanations for this rule of showing our innocence to others.

The first is that if we give the appearance of impropriety others will follow our example. This is particularly true if we occupy a position of prominence or leadership in the Jewish community. We can just hear people say, "If the rabbi can be dishonest and loose with other's money, then I can do the same."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Second, even if the people who think we've done something wrong do not emulate that improper behavior, it will still damage them spiritually for harboring suspicion of another.

The Talmud (Shabbos 97a) states, "One who is suspicious of others who are innocent will be punished bodily." The Talmud cites the example of none other than Moses himself who expressed skepticism whether the Jewish people were worthy of being redeemed. As a punishment for his suspicions Moses was afflicted with the skin condition of tzara'as.

Thus, we are taught, we must remove the basis for others to suspect us improperly.

The Talmud (Berachos 31b) discusses the dialogue between Chanah and Eli, the High Priest. Chanah was praying quietly but Eli thought she was intoxicated. Chanah disabused him of this suspicion. From her response that she was not drunk the Talmud derives:

"When a person is suspected of something they are not guilty of they should clear themselves by notifying that person."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Why Are We Here?

To better understand the need to be transparent to others about our integrity we need to examine our role in this world.

The existential questions every thinking person asks are: why am I here? What is my purpose?

Chassidic literature arrives at two conclusions which reflect two different thrusts and emphases.

In some sources, it highlights the role of the soul to help us understand what life is all about.

In Chassidic philosophy the question about our existence is usually phrased in the following manner:

“Why did G-d send the soul down from a high roof to a low pit?”

The premise of this question is that the soul, before its descent into a physical body, enjoys a most sublime spiritual existence. It basks in the glow of G-d and is in a constant state of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

attachment to its G-dly source. It is the ultimate blissful experience.

All that changes dramatically when the soul “journeys” down into this world and enters into a physical body. The soul then experiences a major decline in its ability to relate to G-d. The Tanya states that the love of the soul of even a perfect *tzadik* cannot approximate the love the soul had in its disembodied state.

So, why would G-d allow the soul to suffer a loss of its greatest desire: to be close to G-d?

“The Descent is for the Purpose of Ultimate Ascent.”

The answer to this question is summed up in a familiar Talmudic phrase: “the descent is for the purpose of ultimate ascent.”

Yes, it is true that the soul goes down many notches of spiritual sensitivity when it enters the body. But, through the soul’s study of Torah, the performance of the Mitzvos and prayer, the soul will rise to an even higher

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

level than it had experienced before descending into the body.

The descent of the soul into this world, while temporarily putting the soul at a deficit, will ultimately prove to be profitable. For this reason our life is compared by our Sages to a business arrangement. We invest in order to earn a profit.

G-d's Focus versus the Soul's Focus

Chassidic literature, however, offers another answer to the vexing question of why we are here but from a different perspective.

While the soul definitely loses (albeit, temporarily) by its presence in a physical body in a materialistic and hedonistic environment, nevertheless its mission and goal is to transform the physical world—starting with one's own body and extending outward to one's possessions and then to one's environment and then to the entire world—into a dwelling place for G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In a sense it is a sacrifice for the soul because the soul did not need to be perfected. While the soul will eventually rise to even greater heights than before, the goal is not the soul's edification and growth but for the fulfillment of G-d's plan for the soul to elevate and transform the physical world.

What is the difference between these two approaches from the vantage point of our feelings?

The first approach is designed to excite our souls into appreciating the benefits that will come to them as a result of leading a good Jewish life. In this mindset, the focus is on our soul and what it will gain; a spiritual business venture. A good businessman does not get upset when he invests large amounts of money because he knows the returns will be enormous.

From this vantage point, we can understand the desire of a person to sacrifice fame and notoriety to serve G-d anonymously as did many great Tzaddikim. Moreover, from this vantage point it makes absolutely no

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

difference if people think that the tzadik did something wrong. The tzadik's devotion to G-d is private, personal and self-effacing.

"I did a Mitzvah and Remained a Thief..."

There is a story about the famous Chassidic Master, Reb Zushe, who was given 200 rubles to marry off his destitute daughter. On his walk home he sees a crowd gathering around a Jew who had fainted because he had lost his wallet with 200 rubles. Reb Zushe promptly declared that he found the money and returned 190 rubles. When the man demanded the other ten Rebe Zushe refused and he was arrested.

When Reb Zushe was released and his mentor, who had given him the 200 rubles for his own dire needs, asked him why he hadn't given over the other ten rubles. His answer was: "People might have discovered that I did a great Mitzvah to sacrifice all that money that I needed desperately. Now, I did the mitzvah, and in the eyes of the public I am but a petty thief..."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

However from the vantage point of fulfilling G-d's desire and purpose to make this world a dwelling place for G-d, it behooves us to follow the public route in our efforts to change the world.

While giving tzedakah anonymously is hailed by the Talmud as a great virtue, giving tzedakah publically encourages others to give too. In addition to generating more help for the needy, it changes the atmosphere of the world into a giving and virtuous society.

Moses' Accounting Clarified

Returning to Moses' accounting, he did not need to make the accounting for G-d. However, Moses realized that the purpose of building a Mishkan was to serve G-d's desire and plan to create a dwelling for Him in this world through the physical structure of the Mishkan. From this vantage point, Moses realized, it was important for him to focus on his public role. What he did privately and anonymously was good for his soul's growth, but for the world at large, Moses needed to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

focus on his public role. First and foremost, one changes the world by example.

While there are times when the first approach of private, quiet, reserved, and hidden service of G-d is needed and valued, we are living in the last moments of exile and making ready to complete G-d's original Master Plan of making the world a dwelling for Him, where the overriding concern has to be about our impact on the world.

The Rebbe told us that the Geulah-Redemption is imminent. We are waiting for G-d's instruction to build the third and final Bais Hamikdash, when G-d's Master Plan to make the world a dwelling place for Him will be completed.

Facebook: A Pre-Messianic Phenomenon

The lesson for us today is that our focus has to be on our public role of bringing the light of Torah and Geulah to the entire world. We cannot hide behind the virtue of humility and miss opportunities to educate and inspire the world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Everything in life is balanced. Whatever dynamics exist in the realm of evil also exist in the realm of good. When the materialistic world is obsessed with exposing everything about ourselves, we have to adopt that approach and channel it into publicizing the Rebbe's message that the Redemption is imminent and that with one Mitzvah, one act of goodness and kindness, we can bring the Final Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY FOUR

THE SECOND MISHKAN

Everything exists on two planes; the earthly
and the heavenly.

This is especially true with the Mishkan,
where the heavenly was openly reflected in
and through the earthly.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY FOUR

THE SECOND MISHKAN

Repetition

Parshas Pikudei presents an accounting of all the materials that went into the construction of the Mishkan-the portable Sanctuary in the desert. It also details all of the components of the Mishkan and mentions how the two chief architects, Betzalel and Ahaliav, executed everything “as G-d commanded Moses.”

The phrase “as G-d commanded Moses” is mentioned repeatedly in this week’s parsha. In fact, nowhere else do we have that expression repeated so many times.

This phenomenon is noted by the Jerusalem Talmud (Berachos 4:3 and Ta’anis 2:2) which counts 18 references to the architects’ compliance with G-d’s command to Moses in this parsha and then explains that it is a hidden reference to Judaism’s most important

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

prayer: the *Amidah*-Standing Prayer or *Shemoneh Esrei*-18. (It is called *Amidah* because one must recite this prayer standing. It is called *Shemoneh Esrei*, which means 18, on account of its original 18 benedictions. Although a 19th blessing was added later, 18 remained its official title.)

The Talmud (both the Babylonian in Berachos 28b as well as in the Jerusalem Talmud, cited above) discusses several reasons why the benedictions for this central prayer numbered 18:

One reason is that G-d's name is mentioned 18 times in Psalm 29. (A Psalm expressing King David's praises to G-d.)

Another opinion bases it on the fact that King David recited 18 Psalms before he used the expression "May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You" (a verse that captures the essence of prayer).

A third opinion is that it corresponds to the 18 time the Patriarchs are mentioned in the Torah. (According to one opinion, the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Patriarchs were the first ones to institute the daily prayers. Hence it is fitting that the daily prayer should be connected to the Patriarchs.)

A fourth view is that it corresponds to the 18 times G-d's name is mentioned in the Shema.

Another view is that it corresponds to the 18 vertebrae in the human body. (When one prays the entire person has to be involved. When we bend our bodies in prayer the vertebrae show.)

A Sixth View

The Jerusalem Talmud cites yet a sixth view that it corresponds to the 18 times the expression “as G-d commanded” is mentioned in this week's parsha. However the Jerusalem Talmud adds the caveat that it refers only to those expressions which appear after the mention of the deputy architect of the Mishkan, Ahaliav. In other words, the first mention of “as G-d commanded Moses” written in connection with Betzalel, the chief architect, is not to be counted.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The obvious question here is: what is the connection between the *Shemoneh Esrei* and the 18 times G-d's command to Moses is mentioned with respect to the construction of the Mishkan?

The classic commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud, *Korban Ha'eidah*, alludes to this question and explains that the institution of prayer, specifically the *Shemoneh Esrei*, took the place of the daily sacrifices after destruction of the Temple. It is thus fitting that the allusion to prayer should be found in the Torah's description of the Sanctuary, the location where sacrifices were offered.

This explanation however leaves us with several questions:

First, why would the prayer be hinted at in the context of the Mishkan and not in the context of the sacrifices themselves?

Second, why would we start counting "as G-d commanded Moses" only after Ahaliav is mentioned?

Third, the Jerusalem Talmud refers to the account of the construction of the Mishkan

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

in this week's parsha as a "*Mishkan sheni*—the second Mishkan." Obviously, it means the Torah's second account of the Mishkan. The first account was recorded in the parsha Terumah, which we read four week's ago, and the second version of the Mishkan is in this week's parsha. Why does the Jerusalem Talmud characterize this as the "Second Mishkan?" It should have said that it was a repetition of the Mishkan saga, but not the "Second Mishkan," which makes it sound like there were two.

We can understand why the Tablets Moses received after he had shattered the first Tablets are described as "the second Tablets." They were, in fact, a second set of Tablets. By contrast, the account of the Mishkan in Pikudei is the same Mishkan discussed in the earlier parsha.

To answer these questions it is important to understand the difference between this week's version of the construction of the Mishkan and the first version, which recorded G-d's original instruction concerning the Mishkan. (See *Likkutei Sichos*,

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

volume 1. P. 195ff for the Rebbe's answer to these questions. What follows is partially based on the discussion there.)

It would seem that the difference is that the Mishkan discussed in Terumah signifies the theoretical aspects of construction of a Sanctuary for G-d. Parshas Pikudei, however, deals with the physical implementation of the plan for the Mishkan. From that perspective we are dealing with the same Mishkan; first in theory, then in reality. But this hardly justifies calling the structure in this week's parsha as "the **Second** Mishkan."

Moreover, in the opening verse of this parsha the Torah actually uses the word Mishkan twice. This would appear to support the Jerusalem Talmud's assertion that there were two Mishkans.

This leads us to the conclusion that, in fact, the two versions reflect two different dimensions of the Mishkan. The first version is the heavenly Mishkan; the Mishkan the way it exists in the spiritual realms. The second version, in Pikudei, is the Mishkan that we

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

have here on Earth. This parallels our Sages' description of a heavenly Beis Hamikdash-Holy Temple that corresponds to the earthly one.

Thus, when the Jerusalem Talmud refers to the version of the construction of the Mishkan in this week's parsha as the "Second Mishkan" it is indeed saying that there are two Mishkans: one in heaven and the other one down here on Earth.

We can now understand why the Jerusalem Talmud connects the *Shemoneh Esrei* with the second Mishkan.

Why Pray Every Day?

There is a well-known question about prayer in general and the *Shemoneh Esrei* in particular. Why would we ask G-d for our needs if on Rosh Hashanah G-d already decreed what we are going to have for the entire year?

We are taught that while it is true that on Rosh Hashanah the blessings that were

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

allocated for us for the coming year have indeed already materialized, they have done so only in a higher form in a higher world. Our daily prayers are required to draw these blessings down into our realm. In other worlds, the blessings we possess on Rosh Hashanah are of the first variety. Our prayer is needed to create the second version of blessing, the one that manifests itself in the physical world and that we can see with our eyes of flesh.

The hint of the prayer that occurs in the account of the Mishkan's construction is not just because the Mishkan was necessary for the sacrifices that prayer came to replace, but because it validates the prayer exercise. It's what translates the heavenly into the earthly.

This also explains why the Jerusalem Talmud includes only those phrases "as G-d commanded Moses" that follow the mention of Ahaliav, the **second** in command.

What is so special about Ahaliav?

One way of looking at his role is that he was second to Betzalel. One could ask why was it

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

necessary for Betzalel to have a deputy? Moreover, as there were many deputies that assisted Betzalel, why then did the Torah single out only one for honorable mention?

One possible answer is that Betzalel and Ahaliav were dealing with two different structures:

Betzalel, whose very name means “in G-d’s shadow,” saw the Mishkan the way it was built in the heavenly spheres. Ahaliav was the one who saw the Mishkan from an earthly perspective. He saw it the way it should be constructed in the here and now.

The two architects then go on to synthesize their visions: the earthly design of Ahaliav would merge with Betzalel’s celestial design.

Thus, the Mishkan the Torah speaks of here is, indeed, the second one. Likewise Ahaliav is the second architect and the *Shemoneh Esrei* represents the **second** concretized version of G-d’s blessings.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Concrete Redemption

The focus on the “second” aspects of the Mishkan, Ahaliav and the *Shemoneh Esrei*, relates to the final Redemption as well.

In the special *kedusha* prayer we recite on Shabbos and the Jewish Holidays, we ask G-d to redeem us “a second time.” This is based on the verse (Yeshayahu 11:11):

“It shall be on that day that the L-rd will once again [literally: “a **second** time”] show His hand to acquire the remnant of His people...”

The simple meaning of the word “second” here is to compare the final Redemption to the exodus from Egypt.

On a deeper level, however, the reference to a “second” Redemption alludes to the notion that the Redemption dynamic exists on two planes: It is generated in the spiritual realms and then it descends to the earthly realm. It further emphasizes that we want and need to experience the Redemption in its earthly and concrete form.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

We are living in unique times so close to the Final Redemption. The Rebbe stated that the Redemption is situated right outside on our doorstep. All we have to do is reach out and bring it in to our lives. The Redemption dynamic is palpable. Our task is, as the Rebbe also added, “to open our eyes” to this reality so that it enters into our consciousness as well.

There is another application of the “second Mishkan” concept to our time. There are two scenarios for the way the Third Temple will be built. According to Rambam it will be built by the Jewish people under the direction of Moshiach. According to Rashi it will descend from Heaven fully fabricated. The Rebbe reconciled these two versions by stating that the Heavenly Beis Hamikdash will descend and become integrated with our earthly Temple. The two dimensions will merge for a most perfect Sanctuary that will last forever.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE WHOSE BUILDING IS IT?

What is the test of true friendship?

**When small things that affect the other
matter to you, even when they don't matter
very much when it comes to your own
interests.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

WHOSE BUILDING IS IT?

The Doublets

This week we read the twin *parshiyos* of Vayakhel-Pikudei, the first of several “double-headers” that are read to accommodate the 54 Torah portions in the course of a lunar year which has no more than 50 weeks (except in a Leap year when another four weeks are added). There are a total of seven such “doublets” chosen, most likely, because of a common thread that runs through them.

The second parsha entitled Pikudei begins with the following verse:

“**These** are the accounts of the
Mishkan (the portable Sanctuary)...

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

which were counted by Moses' command."

And the text continues to provide a detailed accounting of all the materials that went into the construction of the Sanctuary.

Rashi, in earlier comments, provided us with a ground rule concerning the word "*Eileh*-these are." If the Torah places the letter *vav* before the word *Eileh* ("*V'eileh*-And these are") it indicates that what follows is a **continuation** of the preceding section. If, however, the opening word of the parsha is "*Eileh*-these are" without the conjunctive letter *vav*, it means that the new paragraph is detached from, and even negates, the content of the preceding section.

This leads us to an obvious question: How is the content of Pikudei—which discusses the accounting for all of the materials used in the Mishkan—a negation of the preceding parsha which discusses, at length, the contributions made for the Mishkan and the instructions for its construction. These two *Parshiyos* appear quite complementary (for

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

which reason they were apparently chosen as twin readings, as opposed to most other parshiyos that do not enjoy such uniformity).

Obsession with Detail

To answer this question, we must preface another question about the need to put so much emphasis on the attention to detail we find here as is exemplified by the precise accounting of the materials of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan was not just a physical structure. It was a place where Jews would come to get close to G-d, why did it matter so much that its construction be so precise? Why was it so crucial that a very precise accounting of each and every bit of metal be made? Did it really matter if the boards of the Mishkan were one millimeter longer or shorter than the prescribed dimensions given in the Torah? Would it have mattered if they would have used one gram less silver?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In truth, the same question has been asked concerning the details inherent in every Mitzvah. Why the obsession with the details?

The answer to this question will provide us with an important lesson in how we should deal with the needs of others, whether the “other” is G-d or other people. And because this lesson often goes contrary to the way society functions, it is imperative for the Torah to underscore the point.

Opposite Human Traits

As humans we are endowed by our Creator with two opposite attitudes. At times we are awfully rigid and demanding. And at other times we are extremely reasonable, flexible and willing to forego certain demands that we may have on ourselves or others. The challenge of life is to know when to apply them. When should I be rigid and unrelenting and when shall I become soft and flexible?

When it comes to our own possessions, we are so rigid in demanding that everything

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

conform to our preference and taste. Every detail thus becomes important.

How many of us would be happy if we were to discover that our house is missing a minor detail that is dictated by our sense of aesthetics?

Some people would be so upset if things were not perfect in their lives to the point of getting completely bent out of shape. How dare the furniture store sell us a couch that was slightly darker or lighter than the one we wanted! How dare the used car salesperson sell us a car that had 51,000 miles on its odometer when we clearly asked for one that had no more than 50,000? And the list goes on. We are often rigid and unforgiving when we someone else doesn't get it right.

But, when it comes to the needs and requests of others we discover that we have another side to our personality. We are far less rigid. Indeed, we cannot comprehend why the other cares so much about the little

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

details. Why are they so petty and pedantic? Can't **they** be more flexible?

Jewish Ethics: Reverse Your Attitudes!

In truth, Jewish ethics asks us to reverse our attitudes. When it comes to our own needs and interests we should be so much more flexible and forgiving. Big deal if things do not work out the way we wanted it. Is this or that detail so crucial? Looking at life's bigger picture does it really make a difference what color our couch, car or house is? At a funeral do you expect the eulogizer to point out how perfectly matched your clothing was to your furniture?

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with external and physical beauty. There is nothing evil about appreciating the finer things in life, even if they are of an ephemeral nature. But that is because it is an expression of an inner spiritual and ethereal beauty. How beautiful can something be if in the pursuit of external

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

perfection we degrade the inner beauty of our souls? How beautiful are we when we explode in anger because someone was not sensitive to our aesthetic sensibilities? By getting angry we destroy the inner beauty of our souls while ostensibly being zealous about some superficial notion of beauty and perfection.

However, when we deal with the needs and wants of others we have to change our nonchalant attitude. We must respect and care for the needs and wants of others (provided, of course, they are not detrimental to them physically or spiritually) as if they were our own spiritual needs.

“The other’s physical needs are your spiritual needs.”

In the words of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (known as the “Alter Rebbe,” the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement): “The other’s physical needs are your spiritual needs.” Every detail and nuance of the other person’s needs should

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

be sacred to us while the details of our own needs can be safely compromised.

The ultimate demonstration of respect for the other is when we respect their needs and choices (provided, of course, they do not conflict with the law and morality) even if they seem petty to us. In fact, whether our respect for the other is really only a social nicety or it is genuine is determined by the degree we go to fully accommodate the other, and not oneself.

To illustrate this point further:

When we give someone a gift, how much value is there when the choice of gift is what we like and not what the recipient of the gift likes? To send flowers to someone who does not care for them might be a nice gesture, but it is that much more meaningful when we research what the other person would like—no matter how idiosyncratic it may be—and give them that particular item. The former approach is really an expression of one's own ego, the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

latter is an expression of one's sincere respect and concern for the other.

If this is true with regard to the temporal needs and wants of other people, it is surely true with respect to the “wants” (read: commandments) of G-d. (G-d, obviously has no needs, unless He chooses to have them). We cannot argue that the details do not matter because it's not about what we think about the details; it's what G-d thinks about them. Doing a Mitzvah or building a Sanctuary for G-d is not about us; it's about bringing G-d into our lives. And only G-d can determine how He will enter our lives. If we truly respect G-d we will respect His preferences as well, even if we do not comprehend their deeper meaning.

Only *Here* are the Details Crucial

We can now understand why this week's parsha begins with the exclusionary word “*Eileh*-these are”, without the conjunctive letter *vav*, which generally means that what follows is at variance with that which we

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

have read elsewhere. Only here—with regard to the construction of G-d's Sanctuary—are the details so important. Only with respect to G-d's "home" do we have to be so rigid and scrupulous in the way we build it.

By contrast, when dealing with material matters that affect our bodies and homes we should not be so obsessed with detail. There is no law that one must eat their dinner at a given time or that one must dress in accordance with the latest style or that one's home must conform to a certain pattern. And while being organized, neat and looking good is a positive thing; it should not be etched in stone.

There are times when we have to be flexible with our time and external needs and preferences and override the emphasis on the particulars of our lives for the benefit of our souls' interests, which include taking care of the needs of others or building G-d's Sanctuary.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

One of the reasons we get our priorities confused is because we live in the period known as Galus-exile which has been likened to a dream because our perception of things in a dream is confused. Likewise, in exile we confuse night for day and day for night. We confuse the times when being rigid is called for, for the times that we ought to be flexible.

However, in the Age of Redemption (which we are poised to enter into imminently), we will be redeemed not only from the forces of evil that are responsible for war and hatred, but also from those conditions that take away clarity from our lives. In the Messianic Age we will have our priorities in order.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

VOLUNTARY COMMANDMENTS

Some love volunteering.

**Others celebrate the opportunity to serve
G-d unconditionally.**

**To create a home for G-d in this world
requires both a spirit of volunteerism and
sense of obligation.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

VOLUNTARY COMMANDMENTS

Why the Repetition?

After having read for the—who knows how many times—the details of the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert, we finally reach its completion. And here, once more, the Torah , seems to have made an exception to its general pattern of conciseness, bordering on the cryptic.

In the very end of this week's double parsha (*Pikudei*) the Torah states:

“And the Israelites did in accordance with all of that which G-d commanded Moses, so did they do.”

One immediately notices the repetition here. If the Torah made it clear that they did “all of that which G-d commanded Moses, why

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

does the Torah then add, in the very same verse, “so did they do?”

Furthermore, the Torah is quite clear that they did “all,” leaving no room for any interpretation that might have entertained the notion that perhaps they missed some part of the work. Why then does the Torah have to add that “they did so?”

To be sure, the entire story of the construction of the Mishkan has been repeated several times. However, that repetition has been explained as a sign of how precious the Mishkan was; it symbolized that G-d was once more willing to dwell in their midst, even after they had rebelled against him by building the golden calf.

However, what lesson can there be in reiterating how the Jewish people completed their task?

Two Levels of Dedication

One might suggest that there are two levels

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

of dedication: The first is the actual labor; the second is the thought and intent. In some areas, what counts is the thought, while in others what is most important is the action, the deed.

Here, the Torah informs us that both components were equally significant; that the Jews not only completed all that they were commanded to do, in terms of the contributions and the construction of the Mishkan, but moreover, they also fully invested their thoughts, feelings and intent.

However, the language of the text does not support this interpretation. For the text employs the word “doing” in both places, which implies action not thought. When the Torah wishes to convey the idea that they put their heart into the project it uses a term “*nidvas lev*,” which means, the intent or generosity of the heart.

So we are back to square one: Why does the Torah repeat the fact that the Jews did precisely as they were commanded?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Volunteered to Follow the Commandment

However, if one examines the precise wording of the text, the answer to the question is easily resolved: The text reads that they did as G-d commanded Moses. This means simply that they acceded to the commandment. It does not necessarily convey that they would have done it had they not been commanded to do it. Hence the Torah continues: “So did **they** do it.” Here the emphasis is on the word “they.” They did it voluntarily.

Which is Superior: Following a Command or Volunteering?

The Talmud raises the question, which is superior? One who does what is right because he or she was commanded to do it, or one who does something good because he or she wants to do it, even he or she was not commanded to do it.

In truth, one can find advantages to both approaches. On the one hand, what one does voluntarily demonstrates their love and

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

passion for the cause. On the other hand one who does what they are obligated to do demonstrates their ability to accept the authority of G-d even when it goes against one's own grain. Moreover, when there are obligations there are also greater obstacles imposed by one's own "evil impulse," that deters one from fulfilling their duty.

The Best of Both Worlds

In the building of the Mishkan, the Torah informs us, they had the benefit and virtue of both approaches.

On the one hand, they were prepared to do anything for G-d, even if they did not particularly enjoy doing it. And on the other hand, they did it because they truly wanted to do it. And even if they had not been commanded they still would have built the Sanctuary for G-d.

There are certain aspects of Judaism where that combination is most desirable. One of those areas is the effort to transform the world into a macro-Sanctuary for G-d

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

(based on the model of the micro-Sanctuary, the Jews built in the desert), which is the ultimate purpose for the creation of the world in the first place. When we will finally succeed in this endeavor that has been in the making for two thousand years, we will see the fulfillment of all the Biblical prophecies concerning the Messianic Age.

One could approach this endeavor with either one of the two attitudes: One could do it because we were commanded to do it and one could do it because we want to do it.

From this week's parsha, the message we got was that when it comes to building a home for G-d, both approaches are necessary. If one only builds the Sanctuary because he/she was commanded to do so, that would mean that their heart and soul was not a Sanctuary for G-d. Conversely, if we only do it because we enjoy doing it, then we would, in actuality, only be building a Sanctuary for our own desires and passions, as good as they are, but not for G-d. The ideal situation is where we build it for G-d because He told

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

us to do it, and then open our hearts and entire beings to the point where all of us becomes receptive to the Divine presence.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

**ESSAY TWENTY-
SEVEN
TELESCOPE AND
MICROSCOPE**

**Some see the forest but not the trees. Some
see the trees but not the forest.**

**Judaism is about seeing the trees and the
forest.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY- SEVEN

TELESCOPE AND MICROSCOPE

“Everything follows the Conclusion”

Pikudei, the last parsha of the Book of Exodus, discusses the accounting given by Moses for all off the materials that were used in the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary. Indeed, the word *Pikudei* means “the accounting.”:

According to the general principle in the Talmud that “Everything follows the conclusion,” It follows that *Pikudei* —the *parsha* and the word— encapsulates the idea of the Exodus.

When we reflect on the concept of an exodus from slavery it suggests breaking out

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

of those aspects of life that are limiting and pedantic. The more we focus on the details we seem to be getting farther away from freedom, not closer. Indeed, giving an accounting is a rather banal experience. And while we can appreciate the occasional need to give an accounting, we would hardly view it as the climax of an exodus and liberating experience. Why then does the Torah conclude the Book of Exodus on the note of accounting?

Pikudei=Mitzvah

The word *Pikudei* can also be translated as a Mitzvah, a commandment, presumably because each commandment is one of a large number of specific instructions. Here too, the question can be asked, why do we designate a Mitzvah as something that is counted, thereby reducing an otherwise spiritual experience into a statistic; one of 613 commandments?

In truth, the term liberation must be understood properly. In certain situations,

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the obsession with detail can be seen as an impediment to freedom and liberation. A free spirit is often understood as someone who sees the bigger picture and doesn't get bogged down on minutiae. Those small matters a liberated spirit will delegate to other less sophisticated individuals.

Seeing the Big Picture

One way of describing the ability to see the big picture is to employ the metaphor of a telescope. Without the telescope, our vision is limited to our immediate surroundings. With the aid of this device we can see entire galaxies. To go beyond our planet Earth by way of this telescope is to liberate us from the mindset that limits us to one small part of the vast expanse of the universe.

There is another type of situation where liberation can be understood in the opposite fashion. A human being's experiences no matter how enlightening and exhilarating are still products of an inherently limited human potential. When we look at an

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

object with a telescope, we cannot see its true composition and nature. We lack the appreciation for all of its components and dimensions. Here another piece of technology is an appropriate metaphor: the microscope.

When we apply a microscope to an object we expose ourselves to its other dimensions. Are eyes are opened to world to which we were previously oblivious. We get closer to fathoming the very secrets of its existence; we approach its very essence.

In other words, just as one who focuses on some minor detail is denied access to the larger picture, similarly, one who sees the general picture is also limited in that they do not appreciate all the dimensions of the object or concept. Just as one cannot see the forest because of the trees, so too, one can not see the trees because of the forest.

Because we are essentially finite beings, we see things either telescopically or microscopically, or neither. We cannot have both simultaneously. Only G-d can

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

simultaneously see the entire picture, while never losing sight of its nuances and deeper dimensions.

The Mitzvah: A Telescope and Microscope Combined

And the only way we can get a taste of the Divine approach to matters is to perform a Mitzvah, because the Mitzvah has both characteristics, that of the telescope and that of the microscope.

Every Mitzvah, as a G-dly ordained act, connects us to G-d and enables us to experience things from His perspective. All the Mitzvot share this feature of connecting to the Divine regardless of the particular nature of the mitzvah. From this broad perspective we see the world from a spiritually panoramic view.

However, when we perform a specific mitzvah and focus our attention on its particulars, we open our eyes to a new and more penetrating view of the world. The Mitzvah becomes a spiritual “microscope”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

that enables us to see and internalize the most profound and essential levels of existence.

True Liberation

This is what liberation is all about: to be able to access **all** the dimensions of existence. To truly break out of our finite and limited parameters—liberation—we need both the broad and sweeping revelation at Sinai, followed by the detailed instructions and precise accounting that accompanied the building of the Sanctuary. These two themes form the bulk of the Book of Exodus.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, the heavens were opened, affording all the Jews a telescopic view of all the spiritual worlds. By building a Mishkan, with all of the emphasis on its details, the Jews were also given the ability to penetrate the secret of every nuance of G-d's existence.

Indeed, our Sages declared that the Mishkan was a microcosm. By concluding the Book of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Exodus with the theme of counting, the Torah wishes to convey the message that the ultimate Redemption and exodus from exile will bring a reenactment of both themes. On the one hand, the sweeping revelation of Sinai, which enabled us to see the highest of heavens, will once more become a reality for all. In addition, every Jew will be able to look at any aspect of nature and see the Divine essence that gives it its existence.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-EIGHT

THE REAL COMPLETION

**Most feel fulfillment when they complete a
task;**

**True fulfillment is when we realize that we
are on an endless journey.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-EIGHT

THE REAL COMPLETION

Why the Repetition

At the end of the Torah's lengthy description of the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert, the Torah provides us with the following summary:

“And Moses saw the entire work, and behold, they had done it as G-d had commanded, so had they done it. And so Moses blessed them.”

Considering the succinct style of Torah literature, the question that has been raised here is why the Torah repeats itself. First it says,

“...they had done it as G-d had commanded,”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

and then it adds:

“so had they done it.”

Two Mindsets

Rabbi Yisachar Dov of Belz, one of the Chassidic Masters, explained that there are actually two levels of completing a holy project that represent two mindsets. The average person feels a sense of satisfaction and contentment when they finish a task, especially if they invested their every effort in the project.

When a conscientious person undertakes a project for the sake of G-d and completes it to the best of his or her ability, as proud as he may be for his achievement he will invariably feel that his efforts were insufficient: He will say to himself: “I could have done better, and I crave for that opportunity to perfect what I have done.” The more we realize the greatness of G-d for whom we labored, the more we appreciate how inadequate our achievements were.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

This feeling of inadequacy does not stop there. While it does not cause us to be depressed, it further engenders a sense of yearning to be able to perfect one's work.

When we feel how inadequate our best efforts and results were, coupled with a burning desire to do more and better, that is what truly makes our efforts complete. As long as we think we reached the top we have a long way to go. As soon as we realize how far we are no matter how high we climbed we will discover that we have reached the summit.

Hence, the Torah reports that the people did everything precisely as they were commanded. But, in addition to their actions that met with Moses' approval, the Torah adds, "so had they done it," to suggest that their desire to please G-d was so strong that it was as if they did it again.

In other words, the more satisfied and complacent we are with our work the further it is from true perfection, for no human

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

being's achievements rate in relation to G-d who is infinite.

However, when we show G-d how we recognize our inherent limitations and that we truly want to do our best, G-d ascribes His standard of perfection to our actions. And His standards are, of course, truly without flaw.

A Whole Broken Heart

Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, the famed Chassidic Master, once remarked: "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart." He was certainly not suggesting that we should be depressed, G-d forbid. Rather, he was advocating that we never feel that we have invested all of our emotions in the service of G-d and that we have therefore achieved perfection. Instead, we should sense the inherent limits of even our greatest achievements. And then we truly reach wholeness and completion.

This might also add explanation to the Mitzvah of contributing a Half-Shekel to the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Temple; the theme of the additional Torah reading this week. The conventional explanation as to why the Torah wants us to give a half a coin rather than a whole one is to impress upon us the need to recognize our oneness with G-d and with our fellow Jew. Without G-d and others we cannot build the Sanctuary.

In light of the foregoing discussion we might add another insight. It is not enough to finish a project, even with the participation of others, and think that we have finished the project. We must always look for the second half-shekel; the desire to do more to make our work more complete. No matter how much we have expended in the pursuit of building G-d's Sanctuary, we must always seek to do more; make it more perfect.

Our Paradoxical Age

With this premise we can also better appreciate the paradox we are presently in:

On the one hand we are told that we have to be humble; to know our place. We have to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

realize that we stand on the shoulders of giants who came before us. And, at the same time, we have to realize our own importance as the generation that will put the finishing touches on the process of bringing the Redemption. A Mitzvah, our Sages teach us, is credited to the one who completes the task.

How do we reconcile these two opposite feelings? On the one hand we have to know our own limits and stand humbly before the spiritual giants of the past. And on the other hand, we have to recognize our pivotal role in bringing Moshiach and the final Redemption. How could we do both?

The answer is that the way we actually complete the task of bringing an end to the exile and ushering in the period of Redemption is to realize that as much as we have done to make the process compete we crave to do it again, this time more perfectly. By never being content with our role as the ones who complete the Sanctuary of the Messianic Age and realizing our inadequacies,

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

this is precisely the way we achieve
perfection as it relates to the Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-NINE

THE END!

**We get satisfaction when we realize our
potential.**

**The highest form of satisfaction should come
when G-d realizes His potential.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY TWENTY-NINE

THE END!

Three Axioms

This week, the Torah concludes a lengthy description of the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert. Indeed, this one narrative spans five consecutive Torah portions!

It is axiomatic in Judaism that there is no superfluous word in the Torah. It is also axiomatic that every detail of Torah must provide us with guidance and direction in our lives. And a third axiom is that the previous two premises are even more pronounced with respect to the conclusion of a theme or Torah book, as the Talmud states: “everything follows the conclusion.”

The conclusion of the Book of Exodus is this week’s parsha entitled Pikudei, which

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

provides a summation of and accounting for all the resources and actions that went into the construction of the Mishkan. It is therefore also the parsha that concludes the Mishkan narrative.

Moses' Reaction

After all had been completed, the Torah records Moses' reaction to the achievements of the builders of the Mishkan:

“The children of Israel did all the work in accordance with everything which G-d had commanded Moses. Moses saw the entire work, and behold, they had done it as G-d had commanded. They had done it, and Moses then blessed them.”

Rashi reveals to us that the blessing Moses gave was:

“May it be the will [of G-d] that the Divine presence rests in your handiwork.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

What so impressed Moses about their compliance with G-d's will that he was moved to bless them? And why did Moses choose this specific blessing?

Two Models of Craftsmanship

The following is an explanation that is based on the book, *Divrei Sha'arei Chaim* by the nineteenth century Hungarian Rabbi Chaim Sofer, (the author of the *Responsa Machane Chaim*) with additional elucidation based on the teachings of Chabad Chassidus:

There are two models of craftsmanship. There is the artisan who shapes and molds different materials to produce a piece of art. And though the finished product has a function for which it will be purchased and used, the artisan's primary focus is on the degree to which his handiwork enables him to express his creativity and artistic prowess. Even if the artist never gets to use his handiwork his sense of satisfaction is not diminished. His work is all about revealing his own creative potential.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

There is a totally different, utilitarian model of craftsmanship where self-expression and self-actualization is not the goal. The overriding concern of this craftsman is to create something that will serve its function. If the artist is an architect his objective is not focused on his own need for self-expression but, rather, to provide a decent home for someone.

And herein lies the uniqueness of the craftsmen who designed and built the Mishkan and its vessels. To the secular mind which values the world of aesthetics—and certainly to the spiritually inclined—the first approach to creative craftsmanship is by far a superior model. Our society—both secular and religious—is conditioned to think that life is about personal achievement. These approaches vary only as to the definition of personal growth and achievement. To the more sophisticated, achievement is measured not by utilitarian benefits that one provides but by the aesthetic pleasure that one's work engenders.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

To be sure, Judaism values the aesthetic and the world of spirituality. Judaism, especially as it has been articulated in its Mystical literature, emphasizes the role of the soul and the spiritual journey it follows from the time it enters the body and beyond. Judaism “wrote the book” on the need for the person to grow spiritually through the practice of the Mitzvos, Torah study, and prayer. Yet Judaism asserts that the ultimate goal of our actions is not self-actualization. Rather, the objective is to create a dwelling place for G-d by constructing a Sanctuary for Him.

Single-Minded

The craftsmen who designed and built the Mishkan were undoubtedly brilliant artists who exhibited great creativity. But they were single-minded about their goal—to fulfill G-d’s desire to have a place where His presence will be felt and channeled to the entire world.

When Moses beheld the finished product he realized two things: First that they had

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

performed their work admirably, faithfully complying with all the instructions he had given them in G-d's name. But there was a second realization that impressed Moses even more. Their work was devoid of personal ambition and self expression. They had one exclusive thought that permeated their work: to create a Sanctuary for G-d. The Torah thus exclaims: "Moses saw the entire work, and **behold**, they had done it as G-d had commanded." The term "behold" implies that he was not only impressed but that he was surprised with the result. The surprise was the extent to which they suppressed their own egos and agendas—even positive and noble ones—to allow for G-d's agenda to prevail.

We can now understand why Moses' blessing to the craftsmen was: "May it be the will [of G-d] that the Divine Presence rests in your handiwork." His blessing was more than a "pat on the back" to them for a job well done. He was acknowledging how they understood the import of their task; it was not about them but about G-d dwelling in

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

their handiwork. And the greatest blessing for an altruistic person is that his or her efforts will bear fruit.

The above will also serve to answer another question that has been raised as to the need for this entire verse. A few verses earlier the Torah stated virtually the same thing: “All the work of the Mishkan was completed. The children of Israel had done everything that G-d had commanded Moses. They did it.” Why does the Torah have to repeat the fact that “they did all the work in accordance with everything which G-d had commanded Moses?”

The answer is that the initial mention of the completion of their work deals with the integrity of the project itself. The second mention of the completeness of their work deals with the integrity of their thoughts and objectives. They had succeeded in producing an impeccable product with impeccable intentions as well.

The Ultimate Objective of Our Mitzvos

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

The above applies to us, particularly in this present day and age.

We have been commissioned by G-d to be the architects of a world that conforms to G-d's specifications. In complying with His will there are two imperatives:

First we must see to it that we do all that we have been commanded to do precisely as we were told. For example, we cannot change the shape or the number of compartments of the Tefillin that we wear. They must be square and consist of four sections. The way we rest on the Sabbath must conform precisely to the requirements of the Torah, not to our own subjective notion of rest. The same is true with all of the Mitzvos; they must all conform to G-d's will and be performed meticulously.

Second we must make our Mitzvah observance revolve around G-d and not about ourselves. To be sure, the Talmud teaches that one should perform a Mitzvah even if it is for ulterior motives. But we must

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

also know what the ultimate goal is. Our Judaism is not ego-centric but G-d-centric.

Now the definition of G-d centric can also be understood on two levels: one may think of our Mitzvah observance as a way to get closer to G-d, and that is fine. A Mitzvah is a means for expressing the latent spiritual energies of our soul. A higher level, however, is to do the Mitzvah thinking about how to fulfill G-d's desire for a dwelling place in our world. In the former approach, the focus is still on our own ambitions, albeit noble and lofty ambitions to get closer to G-d. In the latter, the focus is on G-d's "ambition."

In truth, the two forms of completeness are intertwined. When a person seeks personal gain, even if it is spiritual in nature, the desire for self-gratification gets in the way of executing the Mitzvah with perfection. Invariably self-interest and ego will consciously or subconsciously alter one small detail of the Mitzvah to conform to one's nature and desire.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

When, however, the sole preoccupation is to fulfill G-d's will and to conform to His plan we cannot deviate one iota from the instructions He gave us.

One of the major achievements of the Messianic Age is that, as we say in our prayers, we will observe the Mitzvos “in accordance with Your will.” What does that mean? Surely we perform many of the Mitzvos properly even today.

However the point is that in the Messianic Age our observance of the Mitzvos will follow the model of the craftsmen of the Mishkan: our observance of the Mitzvos will be motivated by an abiding desire to conform to G-d's will to make the world a dwelling place for G-d.

When we ask G-d to bring Moshiach and the final Redemption, it is not just about universal peace. It is about allowing for G-d's plan—the construction of a world which is in its entirety a Sanctuary for G-d—to be realized by our actions. In truth, we do not have to wait for the Redemption to follow

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

the higher model for the observance of the Mitzvos. As we stand on the threshold of Redemption, our focus should be to complete the process of transforming the entire world into a Sanctuary for G-d. In earlier periods of exile our Mitzvos may have focused less on the ultimate goal and more on subjective goals. In times of exile, there might be other considerations for the observance of the Mitzvos that were geared to help us cope with a specific need that arose due to exile conditions. Mitzvah observance in exile thus, by definition, is lacking in perfection.

Now that we are on the very cusp of the Redemption we must redirect our energies and concentrate on the ultimate goal. By doing so we imbue our Mitzvos with perfection, and we begin to experience the sublime energies associated with the Messianic Age in these last moments of exile.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY THIRTY
HALF TO THE VERY
END

**We are humbled when we are helpless.
Our challenge is to be humble when we have
achieved our goals.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

ESSAY THIRTY

HALF TO THE VERY END

An Extra Torah Reading

Each and every week we read the weekly Torah portion. This week, we read the parsha of Pikudei, which discusses the completion of the Mishkan (the portable sanctuary the Jews built in the desert). It also marks the conclusion of the entire Book of Exodus.

When Shabbos coincides with Rosh Chodesh (the beginning of the Jewish month), we read an extra selection of the Torah that deals with Rosh Chodesh.

This week we also read a third selection of the Torah. In addition to the weekly portion, entitled Pikudei, and the special reading for Rosh Chodesh (as this Shabbos marks the first day of Adar II, the month in which we

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

celebrate Purim), we also read a third selection that is called “Parshas Shekalim.” This selection is about the obligation Jews had—in the days when the Holy Temple stood—to contribute a half shekel to the Temple fund.

It is extremely rare that Parshas Shekalim should coincide with the weekly parsha of Pikudei. In most years, Parshas Shekalim is read with earlier parts of the Book of Exodus.

The Baal Shem Tov taught us that there are no coincidences. Whenever there is a confluence of two events, it happens by Divine providence. Certainly, when two Torah related events come together there is a message that it conveys to us.

The Half-Shekel When the Project is Complete

In the readings of the last few weeks, the Torah has been describing to us, in vivid detail, the way: 1) G-d commanded Moses about the building of the Mishkan; 2) Moses transmitted G-d’s commandment to the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

Jewish people. 3) The people carried out their obligation to collect funds and make the various parts of the Mishkan and its vessels. In this week's parsha it gives us the final tally of the all the materials that were contributed and the way Moses actually erected the Mishkan and brought this major project to fruition.

Now the lesson of giving a half shekel, rather than a whole shekel has been explained by our Sages as a way of underscoring the need for us to realize that whatever we do we can only accomplish half of the task. We must depend on others—other people and, of course, G-d—to make the effort complete.

When we embark on a monumental project, we are naturally daunted by the enormity of the task ahead of us. Many people shy away from these major challenges for that reason. Others recognize that the only way they can succeed is to make the project one in which we have other partners. Otherwise, we know that we will never be able to get the project off the ground.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

In other words, while we might want to take credit for the major undertaking in which we are involved, we are compelled by our own desire to get the project started and completing it, to accept the reality that we can't go it alone.

However, when we actually complete the task, and we no longer have the psychological need to acknowledge the efforts of others, human nature makes us forget, or downplay the contributions of others. Sure, we got help, but we could have done it ourselves, is a frequent refrain heard by people whose egos have not been tamed.

And just as it is with our appreciation for the help extended to us by others, the same is true regarding our dependence on G-d. At first, when things look bleak, we are more than ready to turn to G-d for His assistance. When we reach our goals, we then forget that it was G-d who assisted us all along.

A story is told of a person who had an extremely important business meeting. When he couldn't find a parking space, he turned to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

G-d and offered \$1,000 to charity if G-d would help him find a parking place. While circling the parking lot, he kept on increasing the amount he was prepared to give to charity in return for a parking space, until it reached \$10,000. It was one minute before the time he had to be at the meeting, when suddenly a parking spot became available right in front of the entrance, right in the nick of time. No sooner does he park, when he turns to G-d and says, "Thanks anyhow, but I found a parking space myself..."

This is the lesson of reading about the Half-Shekel in the week when the parsha is Pikudei, which deals the completion of the building of the Mishkan. Precisely when the Mishkan project came to an end and reached fruition it was/is imperative that we acknowledge that we did not do it alone.

Redemption is a Partnership

Throughout Jewish history we were on the road to fulfilling our dream of peace, prosperity and all of the blessings that we

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

were cheated out of for thousands of years. We never took them for granted, as we always expressed our dependence on G-d. We trusted that He would make the world a better place for Jews and for all of humanity. We prayed and hoped that we would survive. And we prayed and hoped for a time when every Jew would be free to practice his/her religion. We prayed and hoped for the return of the Jewish people to their Land. And we never forgot that we depended on G-d for His “half.”

In our day and age when we’ve realized so many of our greatest aspirations, it is imperative for us to appreciate G-d’s role in all of this, and continue to pray to Him to complete the process that will lead to the ultimate Redemption with our righteous Moshiach.

EPILOGUE

One Mitzvah can bring salvation to the entire
world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL- PIKUDEI

EPILOGUE

Parshas Pikudei, the parsha with which the book of Exodus concludes, is read in most years together with *Parshas Vayakhel*. In some years, we read Vayakhel and Pikudei separately.

The Rebbe explained the symbolism and the complementary nature of these two Torah portions:

Vayakhel, which means “And he **gathered**” represents the collective nature and role of the Jewish people. It’s what we do as members of a community and nation. Pikudei, which means “accounting”, by contrast, is about the small details, the role of the individual Jew and the things we do as individuals.

When these two Parshiyos are read together we focus on the complementary nature of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

role of the community and the role of the individual. However, when we read them separately, as we do in a leap year it demands of us to focus separately and more intently on each of these themes.

Thus, in the week of Pikudei we must dwell on the power and privilege of each and every individual as individuals. We must recognize the incredible power we each possess, apart from our membership in a unique nation.

This echoes the famous Talmudic dictum, codified by the great Maimonides, to the effect that just one Mitzvah performed by just one individual can bring salvation to the entire world. And as the Rebbe exhorted us repeatedly that just one Mitzvah can bring about the coming of Moshiach and the final Redemption.

Cataclysmic events in the Middle East and, closer to home are tragic reminders that we are living in momentous times on the very cusp of the Geulah.

In the spirit of Parshas Pikudei we grieve and mourn the loss of even one innocent life as

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – VAYAKHEL-PIKUDEI

we celebrate the good life of even one individual.

Let us therefore all resolve in this week of Pikudei—the last portion of the Book of Exodus, symbolizing the end of the process of Redemption—that the way to transform all of the negative events into the final Redemption through Moshiach is for us to demand of ourselves to do one more Mitzvah; one more minute of Torah study; getting one more Jew to light Shabbos candles, etc.