

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

Vayak'hel-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

Moses **assembles** the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the **Shabbat**. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the making of the **Mishkan** (Tabernacle). The people **donate** the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver, copper, blue, purple and red-dyed wool, goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. Moses has to tell them to **stop giving**.

A team of **wise-hearted** artisans make the Mishkan and its furnishings (as detailed in the previous Torah readings of **Terumah**, Tetzaveh and Ki Tisa): **three layers** of roof coverings; 48 gold-plated wall panels, and 100 silver foundation sockets; the Parochet (**Veil**) that separates between the Sanctuary's two chambers and the Masach (**Screen**) that fronts it; the Ark and its cover with the **Cherubim**; the Table and its **Showbread**; the seven-branched **Menorah** with its specially-prepared oil; and the Golden Altar and the **incense** burned on it; the Anointing Oil; the outdoor Altar for Burnt **Offerings** and all its implements; the hangings, posts and foundation sockets for the **Courtyard**; and the Basin and its pedestal, made out of copper **mirrors**.

An **accounting** is made of the gold, silver and copper donated by the people for the making of the Mishkan. Betzalel, Ahaliav and their assistants make the **Eight Priestly Garments** -- the Efod, Breastplate, Cloak, Crown, Turban, Tunic, Sash and Breeches -- according to the specifications communicated to Moses in the **Parshah of Tetzaveh**.

The Mishkan is completed and all its components are brought to **Moses**, who erects it and anoints it with the holy Anointing Oil, and initiates **Aaron** and his four sons into the priesthood. A **cloud** appears over the Mishkan, signifying the Divine Presence that has come to **dwel** within it.



This being the Shabbat before the 1st of Nissan, we also read the section of Hachodesh (Exodus 12:1-20) which relates G-d's words to Moses in Egypt two weeks before the Exodus, instructing us to set the **Jewish calendar** by the monthly **new moon** and to regard Nissan as the "**head of months**." G-d also instructs to bring the **Passover** offering, to eat it with matzot and bitter herbs, and to abstain from leaven for seven days.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'hel-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

This Shabbat's Torah reading includes both the Parshah of **Vayak'hel** (Exodus 35:1-38:20) and the Parshah of **Pekudei** (38:21-40:38). In addition, because it is the Shabbat before the 1st of Nissan, we also read the section of **Hachodesh** (Exodus 12:1-20).

Vayak'hel records the actual implementation of G-d's instructions on how to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle), recounted earlier in the Parshah of **Terumah**. Indeed, Vayak'hel is very nearly a **repeat** of Terumah—the same details that in Terumah are prefaced with the words, "And they shall make..." are here presented following the preface, "And they made..."

But first,

Moses assembled the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them: These are the words which G-d has commanded, that you should do them:

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a sabbath of sabbaths to G-d: whoever does work on it shall be put to death.

You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.

The Donation

Moses then tells the people:

Take from among you an offering to G-d: whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it...

Gold, and silver, and copper;

Blue, purple, and scarlet [wool], and fine linen, and goats' hair;

Rams' skins dyed red, tachash skins, and shittim wood;

Oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense;

Shoham stones and stones to be set for the efod and for the breastplate.

And every wise-hearted man among you shall come, and make all that G-d has commanded...

The **response** was overwhelming:

Commentary

AND MOSES ASSEMBLED THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL (35:1)

This was on the morning after Yom Kippur, the day that Moses descended from the mountain [with the Second Tablets].

(Rashi)

AND MOSES ASSEMBLED THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND SAID TO THEM... A SABBATH OF SABBATHS TO G-D (35:1-2)

This teaches us that Moses instituted the practice to assemble on Shabbat to listen to the reading of the Torah.

(Midrash)

SIX DAYS WORK SHALL BE DONE; AND THE SEVENTH DAY SHALL BE HOLY... (35:2)

Here the Torah describes the Jew's work in the course of the week as a passive endeavor—"Six days work shall be done" (not "six days you shall do work"). For the Jew regards his workday endeavors not as the source of his sustenance, but merely as a "vessel" in which to receive G-d's blessing..

(The Chassidic Masters)

SIX DAYS WORK SHALL BE DONE; AND THE SEVENTH DAY SHALL BE HOLY... AND EVERY WISE-HEARTED MAN AMONG YOU SHALL COME AND MAKE ALL THAT G-D HAS COMMANDED... (35:2, 10)

Why does the Torah place the commandment to cease work on Shabbat next to the work of the Mishkan? To teach us that a person is guilty of violating the Shabbat only if the work he does has a counterpart in the work of making the Sanctuary: they sowed (the herbs from which to make dyes for the tapestries); you, too, shall not sow [on Shabbat]. They harvested [the herbs]; you, too, shall not harvest. They loaded the boards from the ground onto the wagons; you, too, shall not bring an object from a public domain into a private domain.

(Talmud and Rashi, Shabbat 49b)

Thus the Mishkan not only defines the type of work forbidden on Shabbat, but also the type of work the Jew is engaged in on the other six days of the week: the work of building a home for G-d out of the materials of physical life.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

GOLD, SILVER AND COPPER (35:5)

"Gold" represents the purity and perfection of the tzaddik. "Silver" represents the great yearning of the Baal Teshuvah ("returnee" or penitent) for closeness to G-d—a yearning many times more powerful than that of the tzaddik, because it is a yearning from afar (kesef, the Hebrew word for silver, also means "yearning"; copper, the lowliest of metals, represents the good deeds of the sinner. G-d's home on earth is complete only when it includes all three.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

Torah Reading for Week of March 14-20, 2004

And they came, everyone whose heart stirred them, and everyone whose spirit made willing, and they brought the offering to G-d for the work of the Tent of Meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments.

They came, the men along with the women... and they brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and girdles, all jewels of gold...

The women brought spun thread of multi-colored wool, linen and goat hair for the roof-coverings and the priestly garments; the tribal **heads** brought the precious stones for the High Priest's apron and breastplate and the herbs for the Anointing Oil and the Incense.

And all the wise men who carried out all the work of the Sanctuary came, every man from his work which they did, and they spoke to Moses saying: "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which G-d

commanded to do."

And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp saying: "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing.

The material was sufficient for all the work to do it, and too much.

The Making of the Sanctuary

The team of "wise-hearted" artisans, headed by Betzalel ben Uri from the tribe of Judah and Ahaliav ben Achisamach of the tribe of Dan, set about the task of fashioning these 15 materials into a dwelling for the Divine Presence.

*And they made the ten tapestries of the Mishkan[s roof] of finely-spun linen and [wool dyed] **blue, purple and scarlet**; with cherubim of artistic work did [Betzalel] make them...*

And he made sheets of goat-hair as an Ohel (tent-covering) over the Mishkan—eleven sheets he made them....

And he made the boards for the Mishkan[s walls] of shittim wood, to be stood upright... twenty boards for the south walls; and forty silver foundation-sockets made he under the twenty boards: two sockets under each board, for its two pegs... And for the other side of the Mishkan—for the north

Commentary

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND THEY CAME, EVERYONE WHOSE HEART STIRRED THEM... BROUGHT THE OFFERING TO G-D (35:21)

It is written, "That which emerges from your lips, you shall observe and do" (Deuteronomy 23:24). From this we know only, if he uttered it with his lips; if he decided in his mind, how do we know that he must keep his promise? Because it says, "Everyone whose heart stirred them... brought the offering to G-d."

(Talmud, Shevuot 26b)

THEY CAME, THE MEN ALONG WITH THE WOMEN (35:22)

The women came **first** and the men followed.

(Nachmanides)

AND THE TRIBAL HEADS BROUGHT THE SHOAM STONES (35:27)

When Moses said, "Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, the offering for G-d," and did not say it directly to the princes; they were displeased at not being asked to bring, and so they thought: Let the people bring what they will and we shall make good whatever they omit. But all Israel entered with zeal into the work of the Mishkan and joyfully and enthusiastically brought all the donations. See what is written about this! "And they came, the men along with the women"—they came one on top of another, men and women together in an intermingled

throng, and in two mornings they had brought all the necessary donations... The princes then wished to bring their donations but could not, because Moses had already given orders: "...Let neither man nor woman bring any more..." The princes were distressed, and said: "Seeing that we were not privileged to participate in the offerings to the Mishkan, let us give towards the garments of the High Priest..." This is why when the Mishkan was completed the princes took the initiative, and were the first to bring offerings for its dedication (cf. Numbers 7)..

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THEY SPOKE TO MOSES SAYING: "THE PEOPLE BRING MUCH MORE THAN ENOUGH..." (36:5)

Said Rabbi Aba bar Achah: There's no understanding the character of this people! They're solicited for the Calf, and they give; they're solicited for the Mishkan—they give.

(Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 1:1)

AND THE PEOPLE WERE RESTRAINED FROM BRINGING (36:7)

When so commanded, refraining from doing a mitzvah is no less a mitzvah than doing a mitzvah.

(Alshich)

AND HE MADE THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING... FIVE CUBITS WAS ITS LENGTH, AND FIVE CUBITS ITS BREADTH; IT WAS FOURSQUARE; AND THREE CUBITS ITS HEIGHT (38:1)

"And three cubits its height." Rabbi Judah says: this is meant literally. Rabbi Jose said: Here it says "foursquare" (ravua), and regarding the Incense Altar it also says, "foursquare"; as the Incense Altar's height

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

side—he made twenty boards and forty silver sockets... and for the rear of the Mishkan, to the west, he made six boards, and two boards for the rear corners....

And he made the Parochet (the “veil” that separated between the Sanctuary’s two chambers) of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine-spun linen; with artistically woven cherubim he made it...

And he made a Screen for the doorway of the Tent: of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine-spun linen, with embroidered work...

The Sanctuary’s Vessels

And Betzalel made the Ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And he overlaid it with pure gold within and without, and made a rim of gold to it round

about...

And he made the Kaporet (the Ark’s cover) of pure gold.. and he made two cherubim of gold, beaten out of one piece he made them, on the two ends of the covering... And the cherubim spread out their wings on high, and spread with their wings over the covering, with their faces one to another...

And he made the Table of shittim wood... and covered it with pure gold...

And He made the Menorah of pure gold; of beaten work made he the Menorah, its foot, its shaft, its branches, its goblets, its bulbs, and its flowers, were of the same piece...

And he made the Incense Altar of shittim wood... and covered it with pure gold...

And he made the Anointing Oil holy, and the Incense of Spices pure...

The Outdoor Furnishings

And he made the Altar of Burnt Offering... five cubits was its length, and five cubits its breadth; it was foursquare; and three cubits its **height**...

And he made the Basin of copper, and its pedestal of copper, out of the **mirrors** of the women assembling, who assembled at the door of the Tent of Meeting...

Commentary

was twice its length, so here, too, its height was... as the tabernacle was ten cubits high, so was the Altar ten cubits high. How, then, do I understand the verse, “And three cubits its height”? Three cubits from the ledge (a ledge encircled the Altar and served as a walkway for the Kohanim).

(Talmud, Zevachim 59b; Rashi)

AND HE MADE THE BASIN OF COPPER... OUT OF THE MIRRORS OF THE WOMEN ASSEMBLING... (38:8)

The daughters of Israel had mirrors in which they looked to adorn themselves; these, too, they did refrain from donating to the making of the Mishkan. Moses disdained these mirrors, since their purpose is to awaken lust. Said G-d to him: Accept them, for these are more beloved to Me than everything else: through these, the women begot hosts of children in Egypt. When their men were exhausted by hard labor, they would go and bring them food and drink and feed them. They would take along the mirrors, and each would look at herself in the mirror together with her husband and tease him, saying, “Look, I’m more beautiful than you,” thus awakening desire in her husband and cohabiting with him and conceiving and giving birth there, as it is written (Song of Songs 8:5), “Under the apple tree I roused you.”

(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

THESE ARE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE TABERNACLE... BY COMMAND OF MOSES... BY THE HAND OF ITAMAR THE SON OF AARON (38:21)

The Sages taught: Always appoint at least two people together as

trustees over public funds. Even Moses, who enjoyed the full trust of G-d—as it is written (Numbers 12:7), “In all My house, he is trusted”—figured the accounts of the Sanctuary together with others, as it says: “By the hand of Itamar the son of Aaron.”

Thus the Sages taught: the one who made the appropriation [of the monies donated to the Holy Temple] did not enter the chamber wearing either a hemmed cloak or shoes or sandals or tefillin or an amulet (i.e., nothing in which money can be hidden); lest if he became poor people might say that he became poor because of an iniquity committed in the chamber, or if he became rich people might say that he became rich from the appropriation in the chamber. For it is a man’s duty to be free of blame before men as before G-d, as it is said (ibid., 32:22): “And be guiltless towards G-d and towards Israel.”

(Midrash Tanchuma; Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2)

AND THE SILVER... WAS A HUNDRED TALENTS, AND A THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY FIVE SHEKELS, AFTER THE SHEKEL OF THE SANCTUARY (38:25)

The Roman general Contrococ questioned Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: If each gave half a shekel, there should have been 201 talents and 11 maneh of silver... Was Moses your teacher either a thief or a swindler or else a bad arithmetician? He gave a half, took a half, and did not [even] return a complete half? Replied Rabbi Yochanan: Moses our teacher was a trustworthy treasurer and a good arithmetician; these talents were measured in “the shekel of the Sanctuary,” which is double the common measure.

(Talmud, Bechorot 5a)

AND IT CAME TO PASS... THAT THE TABERNACLE WAS ERECTED (40:17)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

And he made the courtyard: on the south side, he hangings of the court were of fine twined linen, a hundred cubits in length; their pillars were twenty, their copper sockets twenty, and the hooks of the pillars and their trimmings were of silver. And for the north side the hangings were a hundred cubits... And for the west side were hangings of fifty cubits... The [width of] the east side was fifty cubits, [with] hangings of fifteen cubits on each side [of the entrance]...

And the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered work, of blue, purple and scarlet, and fine twined linen; and twenty cubits was the length...

And all the pegs of the tabernacle, and of the court round

about, were of copper.

Pekudei: The Audit

Pekudei ("Accounts") is the closing Parshah of the Book of Exodus and last in a series of five Parshiot describing the making of the Mishkan. The Parshah includes: 1) an **audit** of the gold, silver and copper used in the Mishkan's construction; b) the making of the priestly garments; c) the erection and consecration of the Mishkan.

These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, as they were counted by the command of Moses...

The Menorah and the Kaporet (Ark cover) were of solid gold; the Ark, Table, Golden Altar, and the Mishkan's wall panels and posts were gold-plated; gold thread was added to the fibers in the roof coverings, the Veil (*Parochet*), screens and the High Priest's garments. Altogether,

Commentary

Whenever the Torah uses the word *vayehi* ("and it came to pass"), this connotes a woeful event. What woe was there in the Mishkan's completion? This is comparable to a king who had a contentious wife. So he said to her: "Make me a purple cloak." As long as she was preoccupied with it, she did not quarrel. When her work was completed, she brought it to the king. The king saw it and was pleased with it, and began to cry out, "Woe! Woe!" Said his wife: "What is this, my lord? I have labored to do your will, and you cry, 'woe, woe'?" Said he to her: "The work is beautiful and favorable in my eye. But as long as you were preoccupied with it, you did not anger or provoke me; now that you are free of it, I fear that you will again anger me."

So, too, said G-d: "As long as my children were occupied with the Mishkan, they did not grumble against Me. Now they will again begin to provoke Me." Therefore it says *vayehi—vy hii*, "woe is it."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

IN THE FIRST MONTH... ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTH, THE TABERNACLE WAS ERECTED (40:17)

On the 25th of Kislev the work of Mishkan was completed, and its components sat folded up [for three months] until the 1st of Nissan, because G-d wanted that the Mishkan should be erected in the month that Isaac was born... The month of Kislev was thus deprived. Said G-d: "I must compensate it." How did G-d compensate the month of Kislev? With the dedication of the Temple by the Hashmoneans (on Chanukah).

(Pesikta Rabbati)

When did the consecration of the Sanctuary begin? On the twenty-third of Adar. And on the first of Nissan the days of consecration were completed. During each of the seven days of consecration Moses set up the Tabernacle and offered his sacrifices in it every morning and then pulled it down. On the eighth day he put it up but did not dismantle it again.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Seven times Moses erected the Mishkan and then dismantled it, presaging the seven Sanctuaries that would serve the Jewish people: the Tabernacle in the desert, those at Gilgal, Shiloh, Nov and Givon, and the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Seven times Moses dismantled the Tabernacle and then set it up again, so that the future falls of these Sanctuaries should not be permanent, but be followed by a rebuilding. Thus we are guaranteed that the destruction of the seventh Sanctuary will be followed by the building of the Third Temple, which shall never be destroyed.

(Rabbi Avraham Mordechai of Gur)

AND THE GLORY OF G-D FILLED THE TABERNACLE (40:34)

What is the meaning of the verse (Song of Songs), "I have come into My garden, My sister, My bride"? This means [G-d says, "I have returned] to My bridal chamber, to the place which has been My principal abode from the very beginning." For was not the principal abode of the Shechinah (Divine Presence) in the terrestrial regions? For so it is written (Genesis 3:8), "And they heard the voice of the L-rd G-d walking in the garden"...

But when Adam sinned, the Shechinah betook itself to the first heaven. When Cain sinned, it betook itself to the second heaven; when the generation of Enosh sinned, it ascended to the third heaven; when the generation of the Flood sinned it rose to the fourth heaven; when the generation of the Tower of Babel sinned, it moved up into the fifth heaven; when the people of Sodom sinned, it rose into the sixth heaven; and when the Egyptians sinned, it ascended into the seventh heaven.

Then arose seven righteous people who brought the Shechinah down from the celestial to the terrestrial regions: Abraham brought it down from the seventh heaven to the sixth, Isaac brought it down from the sixth to the fifth, Jacob brought it down from the fifth to the fourth, Levi brought it down from the fourth to the third, Kehat brought it down from the third to the second, Amram brought it down from the second to the first and Moses brought it down from the celestial to the terrestrial region... When did the Shechinah come to dwell on earth? On the day

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

The gold of the offering was twenty nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels, after the shekels of the sanctuary.

The silver for the Mishkan was supplied by the **half-shekels** contributed by each of those who "went to be numbered": 603,550 men of draftable age, each giving half a shekel, made 100 talents plus 1,775 shekels of silver (a "talent" is approximately 150 lbs.). The 100 talents were used to make the 100 foundation sockets that held up the Mishkan's wall panels and posts; the 1,775 shekels were used for the hooks and trimmings on the 60 posts that held up the wall-hangings which enclosed the

Courtyard.

The copper totaled 70 talents and 2,400 shekels, and was used to make "the foundation sockets to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; the copper brazen altar and its copper grate and all the vessels of the altar; the foundation sockets of the court round about and the sockets of the court gate; and all the pegs of the tabernacle and all the pegs of the court round about."

The Priestly Garments

Although the priestly garments have already been described in detail in G-d's instruction to Moses related in the Parshah of Tetzaveh the Torah now devotes 30 verses (39:2-31) to repeat these details in describing the actual making of the garments:

And he made the Eford of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen...

And he made the Breastplate... And they set in it four rows of stones ... inclosed in fixtures of gold in their settings. And the stones were according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names

Commentary

when the Tabernacle was erected, as it says, "And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND MOSES WAS NOT ABLE TO ENTER THE TENT OF MEETING, BECAUSE THE CLOUD RESTED ON IT, AND THE GLORY OF G-D FILLED THE TABERNACLE (40:35)

Rav Zerika raised the following contradiction: One verse reads, "And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it," whereas another verse (Exodus 24:18) says: "And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud"? This is to tell us that G-d took hold of Moses and brought him into the cloud.

(Talmud, Yoma 4b)

Said Rabbi Chama bar Chaninah: Can it be that Moses feared the cloud? Is it not already written, "And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud"? ... In what sense was he "not able"? Because Moses accorded honor to the Shechinah, and did not enter until he was summoned inside.

(Midrash HaGadol)

THIS CHODESH (NEW MOON, MONTH) SHALL BE TO YOU THE HEAD OF MONTHS; IT SHALL BE FOR YOU THE FIRST OF THE MONTHS OF THE YEAR (12:2)

G-d showed Moses the new moon at its moment of rebirth, and said to him: "When the moon is reborn, mark the beginning of a new month."

(Mechilta)

There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem called Beth Ya'azek, where all the witnesses (who had seen the appearance of the new moon) used to assemble, and the bet-din (rabbinical court) used to examine them. They used to entertain them lavishly there, so that they should have an inducement to come...

The pair of witnesses who arrived first were cross-examined first. The senior of them was brought in and they said to him: "Tell us how you saw the moon — in front of the sun or behind the sun? to the north of it or the south? how big was it, and in which direction was it inclined? and how broad was it? ... Rabban Gamaliel used to have diagrams of the phases of the moon on a tablet on the wall of his upper chamber, and he used to show them to the unlearned and ask, "Did it look like this or this?"

After that they would bring in the second witness and question him. If their accounts tallied, their evidence was accepted. The other pairs were questioned briefly — not because they were required at all, but so that they should not be disappointed and discouraged from coming (the next time).

The head of the bet-din would then proclaim: "Sanctified!", and all the people would repeat after him, "Sanctified! Sanctified!"

(Talmud, Rosh Hashanah ch. 2)

What blessing was to be recited by one who beholds the new moon, in the period when Israel used to sanctify the new month? Some of the Sages hold: "Blessed be He who renews the months." Others say: "Blessed be He who consecrates the months." And others say: "Blessed be He who hallows Israel," since unless Israel sanctifies it, it is not sanctified at all.

(Midrash Rabbah)

The people of Israel set their calendar by the moon, because they are the moon of the world.

(Zohar)

The moon begins to shine on the first of the month and increases in luminance till the fifteenth day, when her orb becomes full; from the fifteenth till the thirtieth day, her light wanes, till on the thirtieth it is not seen at all. With Israel too, there were fifteen generations from Abraham to Solomon. Abraham began to shine... Jacob added to this light... and

commanded Moses, so they did."

The Dwelling Assembled

And they brought the Tabernacle to Moses... And Moses saw all the work, and, behold, they had done it as G-d had commanded, even so had they done it; and Moses blessed them....

And it came to pass in the first month (Nissan) in the second year (from the Exodus), on the first day of the month, that the Tabernacle was erected.

And Moses erected the Tabernacle, and fastened its sockets, and set up its wall panels, and put in its bars, and reared up its pillars.

And he spread the tent over the Mishkan, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he took and put the [Tablets of] Testimony into the Ark, and set the carrying poles on the Ark, and put the Kaporet above upon the Ark. And he brought the Ark into the Tabernacle, and set up the Veil of the screen, and screened the Ark of the Testimony; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he put the Table in the Tent of Meeting, upon the northward side of the Tabernacle, outside the Veil. And he set the bread in order upon it before G-d; as G-d had commanded Moses

And he put the Menorah in the Tent of Meeting, over against

Said G-d: "The righteous shall be called by your name—'Jacob the Small,' 'Samuel the Small,' 'David the Small.'"

Still G-d saw that the moon was not appeased. So G-d said: "Offer an atonement for My sake, for My having diminished the moon." This is the significance of what Reish Lakish said: "Why does the he-goat offered on Rosh Chodesh (the first of the month) differ from the others in that it is specified as 'for G-d'? G-d is saying: "This he-goat shall atone for My diminishing of the moon."

The months of the year are lunar months, as it is written: "... This chodesh shall be to you the head of months." So said our sages: G-d showed Moses the figure of the [new] moon in a prophetic vision, and said to him: "Thus you should see and sanctify."

However, the years which we figure are solar years, as it is written: "Keep the month of spring" (i.e., ensure that the month of Passover is always in the spring season).

The solar year is eleven days longer than a year of [twelve] lunar months. Therefore, when this surplus accumulates to the amount of 30 days — either a little more or a little less — one adds an extra month so that the year has 13 months; this is what is called a shanah meuberet ("pregnant year"). Because one cannot make the year to consist of so many months plus so many days, since the verse says, "[It shall be for you the first of] the months of the year" — implying that the year should consist of months, and months only.

The moon is concealed each month, and remains invisible for approximately two days — for about one day before it is closest to the sun and

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

And he made the Cloak of the Efod of woven work, all of blue... And they made upon the hems of the Cloak pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and twined linen. And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe...

And they made tunics of fine linen of woven work for Aharon, and for his sons; and the turban of fine linen... and linen breeches of fine twined linen; and a sash of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, the work of an embroiderer; as G-d commanded Moses.

And they made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote upon it a writing, like the engravings of a signet, "Holy to G-d." And they tied to it a lace of blue, to fasten it on the turban above; as G-d commanded to Moses.

"Thus was all the work of the tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting **finished**; and the children of Israel did according to all that G-d

Commentary

after them came Judah, Perez, Chetzron, Ram, Aminadav, Nachshon, Samuel, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. When Solomon appeared, the moon's orb was full... Henceforth the kings began to diminish in power... With Zedekiah [in whose time the Holy Temple was destroyed] the light of the moon dimmed entirely.

(Midrash Rabbah)

It is written (Genesis 1:16), "And G-d made the two great luminaries"; but then it says, "The great luminary... and the small luminary?"

[Indeed, at first they were both great; but then] the moon said to G-d: "Master of the Universe! Can two kings wear the same crown?"

Said G-d to her: "Go diminish yourself."

Said she to Him: "Master of the Universe! Because I have said a proper thing, I must diminish myself?"

Said He to her: "You may rule both during the day and at night."

Said she to Him: "What advantage is there in that? What does a lamp accomplish at high noon?"

Said He to her: "The people of Israel shall calculate their dates and years by you."

Said she to Him: "But the sun, too, shall have a part in that, for they shall calculate the seasons by him."

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

the table, on the southward side of the tabernacle. And he lighted the lamps before G-d; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he put the Golden Altar in the Tent of Meeting before the Veil: and he burnt sweet incense upon it as G-d commanded Moses.

And he set up the Screen at the door of the tabernacle. And he put the Altar of Burnt Offering before the door of the Tabernacle... and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meal offering; as G-d commanded Moses.

And he set the Basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water there, for washing...

And he erected the Court round about the Tabernacle and

the Altar, and set up the screen of the court gate. And Moses finished the work.

The **Dwelling** Inhabited

And the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle...

When the cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: but if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up.

For the cloud of G-d was upon the Tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

Hachodesh

This being the Shabbat before the 1st of Nissan, a special Torah reading (Exodus 12:1-20), called *Hachodesh* ("the month" and "the new [moon]"), is added to the regular Torah reading. This is the fourth of four supplementary readings added in the weeks preceding Purim and Passover.

Commentary

about one day after it is closest to the sun, after which it can be seen in the west in the evening. The night on which it is visible in the west marks the beginning of the month, and one counts from that day 29 days. If the moon is visible on the eve of the 30th, then the 30th day is Rosh Chodesh ("head of the month"); if not, then the 31st day is Rosh Chodesh, and the 30th day belongs to the previous month.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Sanctification of the Month)

Time is the first creation (see Sforno on Genesis 1:1); thus, the sanctification of time is the first mitzvah commanded to Israel.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

THE HEAD OF MONTHS (EXODUS 12:2)

When G-d chose His world, He established heads of months and years. When He chose Jacob and his sons, He established the head of the month of redemption.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Thus there are two "heads" to the Jewish year. The 1st of Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah), the day of the creation of man, is the head of the natural year—the year which the Jew shares with all of creation. The month of Nissan, marking the Exodus and the birth of Israel, is the head of a miraculous year: a dimension of time, inhabited solely by the Jew, in which the miraculous—i.e., the power to transcend nature and norm—is the very stuff and substance of life.

(The Chassidic Masters)

On the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb... You shall keep it until the 14th day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it towards evening (12:3-6)

When G-d told Moses to slay the paschal lamb, Moses said: "Master of the Universe! How can I possibly do this thing? Don't You know the lamb is the Egyptian god? 'Lo, if we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?'"

Said G-d: "By your life, Israel will not depart from here before they slaughter the Egyptian gods before their very eyes, that I may teach them that their gods are really nothing at all." This is what He actually did; for on that night He slew the Egyptian firstborn, and on that night the Israelites slaughtered their paschal lamb and ate it.

(Midrash Rabbah)

That year, the 10th of Nissan was a Shabbat; this is why the Shabbat before Passover is called Shabbat HaGadol ("The Great Shabbat") — because a great miracle happened on that day. For when the Children of Israel took their paschal lambs on that Shabbat, the Egyptian firstborn converged on them and asked them: "Why are you doing this?" They replied: "It is a passover sacrifice to G-d, for He will kill the firstborn of Egypt." The firstborn approached their fathers and Pharaoh to request that Israel be allowed to go, but they refused; so the firstborn waged war against them, killing many of them. Thus the verse (Psalms 136:10) proclaims: "[Offer thanks] to He who smote the Egyptian with their firstborn."

(Tosafot on Talmud, Shabbat 87b)

I WILL PASS THROUGH THE LAND OF EGYPT THIS NIGHT, AND WILL SMITE ALL THE FIRSTBORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT... AND AGAINST ALL THE GODS OF EGYPT I WILL EXECUTE JUDGMENTS: I AM G-D (12:12)

"I will pass" — I, and no angel; "I will smite" — I, and no seraph; "I will execute" — I, and no messenger; "I am G-d" — I am He, and no other.

(Passover Haggadah)

AND AGAINST ALL THE GODS OF EGYPT I WILL EXECUTE JUDGMENTS (12:12)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

Exodus 35:1-40:38

Hachodesh contains G-d's communication to Moses on the 1st of Nissan, in Egypt, two weeks before the Exodus, in which He conveys to him the **first mitzvah** commanded to the people of Israel: To set the **Jewish calendar** in accordance with the monthly birth of the **new moon**, and regard Nissan, the month of the Exodus, as "the head of months."

And G-d spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying:

*"This chodesh shall be to you the **head of months**; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year."*

Also conveyed to Moses is the commandment to bring a "Passover offering" to G-d while still in the land of **Egypt**:

On the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb... a lamb for each household...

*You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the entire **community** of the congregation of*

Israel shall slaughter it towards evening.

They shall take the blood, and put it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses in which they shall eat it. And they shall eat the meat in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread: and with bitter herbs they shall eat it...

Thus shall you eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your band; you shall eat it in haste, it is G-d's Passover.

For will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast: and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am G-d.

And the blood shall be to you for a sign upon the houses where you are: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

A seven-day festival beginning on this night (the eve of Nissan 15) should be established for all generations.

For on this very day I have brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt...

Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses... in all your habitations shall you eat matzot (unleavened bread).

Commentary

Those that were of wood rotted; those that were of metal melted.

(Rashi)

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

SEVEN DAYS SHALL THERE BE NO LEAVEN FOUND IN YOUR HOUSES (12:19)

On the eve of the fourteenth [of Nissan] a search is made for leaven by the light of a candle... Why a candle? So that it can be brought into holes and chinks [in the wall].

(Talmud, Pesachim 2a, 8b)

There are other foods whose consumption is forbidden by the Torah; but leaven on Passover is forbidden to eat, benefit from in any way, or even keep in our possession. Usually, a forbidden substance becomes "nullified" if it mixes with a much greater quantity of permissible substances; of leaven, the Torah forbids even the slightest trace.

This is a reflection of what these "forbidden foods" represent on the spiritual level. Leaven is that which rises and inflates itself; in the human character, "leaven" is the trait of pride. While many negative traits can be useful in small, greatly diluted doses, the leaven of the soul must be utterly rejected. Thus the Talmud (Erchin 15b) states that G-d says of the arrogant one, "I and he cannot dwell in the same world," and Maimonides writes that while in all character traits one should follow the "golden mean," regarding the trait of pride, one must avoid it entire-

ly and follow the path of consummate humility. Like chametz on Passover, we must abandon any attempt to exploit it, and must totally eradicate it from every nook and cranny of our hearts.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'hel-Pekudei

From the Chassidic Masters

This week's Torah reading—the joined Parshiot of Vayak'hel and Pekudei—is replete with questions and contradictions. The first enigma is the question of why these Parshiot exist at all. Most of their content seems completely superfluous.

The Torah is very mincing with words: laws whose details cover many pages in the Talmud are expressed by the Torah in a single sentence or word, or even by means of a single extra letter. But when it comes to the Sanctuary made by the people of Israel in the Sinai Desert, the Torah does a very unusual thing: it elaborates. And then it elaborates some more

First (in the Parshiot of Terumah and Tetzaveh) we get a description of every one of the Sanctuary's dozens of components as spelled out in G-d's instructions to Moses. And then we get all the details a second time, in the account of the Sanctuary's actual construction in the Parshiot of Vayak'hel and Pekudei. The most amazing thing is that these two descriptions are virtually identical! The only real difference is that in the first account, the description of each item begins, "And they shall make..." and in the second account it begins, "And they made..."

The Sanctuary is the prototype of the "dwelling for G-d in the physical world" whose construction constitutes our mission in life. That's why the details are so important. But why do they have to be related twice? Couldn't the Torah simply say, "And the Children of Israel built it exactly as G-d had commanded"?

Why It's Frustrating Having a Brain

Having a brain means that you not only know how things are, but you also understand how things ought

to be. Which means that you're constantly being made aware that things are not as they ought to be.

Human beings (most of whom have brains) deal with this frustration in a variety of ways. Some become "academics", which means that they concentrate on the way things ought to be and make believe that that's the way things are. Those who for some reason (usually job-related) are compelled to deal with the way things are, try not to think about the way things ought to be. Since neither approach can be maintained 100% of the time, human beings enjoy a higher stress level than cows, for example.

This has led humans to invent all sorts of salves and balms for stress, on the one hand, and all sorts of devices to do away with (or at least numb) the brain, on the other. Which is a shame, since it's great having a brain, and it's healthy to experience stress.

That's the lesson implicit in the "superfluous" chapters of Vayak'hel and Pekudei.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the Torah wants to emphasize that there will always be two versions of G-d's home on earth: the ideal version, as G-d envisions it and describes it to Moses, and the real version, as it is actually built in and out of our physical lives.

Does this mean that G-d is making allowances? That His vision can be compromised by "the way things are" down here? But *both versions are exactly the same* in the Torah's account! In other words, we are empowered—and expected—to *recreate* the divine ideal in its entirety, down to every last peg, clasp and carrying pole, within the material world.

Recreate—not duplicate. G-d does not want us to transform physical matter into substanceless spirit; He wants us to make the *physical* world hospitable to His presence.

Being human means never ceasing the effort to translate the ideal into the real. Not that we can eliminate the gap between matter and spirit. We can do better: we can make our lives a physical version of the divine vision. Human life is an attempt to achieve the impossible—an attempt that fails, and in failing, achieves something even greater.

If you're experiencing stress, you're doing something right.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'hel-Pekudei

From the Chassidic Masters

The Second Enigma: Transposed Headings

The second enigma of the Parshiot of Vayak'hel and Pekudei concerns the names by which they are called, and an apparent contradiction between each Parshah's name and its content.

To the casual reader, the names by which the 54 sections of the annual Torah-reading cycle are called seem quite incidental: a Parshah is almost always named after the first distinctive word to appear in its text. Chassidic teaching, however, which sees every event and phenomenon as specifically determined by Divine Providence, rejects the very concept of "incidence." Furthermore, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Chassidism teaches that the name of an object in the Holy Tongue constitutes its soul and essence; the Rebbe also points out that the word *torah* means "instruction," implying that there is nothing in Torah that is not instructive. Hence, the Rebbe concludes, there certainly cannot be anything "incidental" about the name of a section in Torah.

At his weekly Shabbat *farbrengens* the Rebbe would often dwell on the name of the Parshah read that week, demonstrating how this single word or phrase indeed enfolds within it the entire breadth and variety of the Parshah's contents, and how this Parshah name, when its nuances are analyzed and set against the other components of the Jewish calendar with which it intersects, carries a wealth of information and instruction to our daily lives (for two examples, see *Life after Death* and *Learning to Laugh*)

Vayak'hel means "assembly" and "community," while the word *Pekudei* connotes itemization and individuality. So these two Parshiot, which follow each other in the Torah and on certain years are even joined together to form a single reading, express the

conflict, interaction and paradox of these two components of the human soul: a) our need and desire to bond together in a communal identity; b) our need and desire for an individual identity distinct and unique from our fellows.

But the most amazing thing about Vayak'hel and Pekudei is not that both are given equal prominence in the Torah; nor that they appear in the Torah in such proximity to each other; and not even that these seemingly dichotomous concepts are often fused to form a single reading called Vayak'hel-Pekudei. The most amazing thing about these two Parshah names is that they seem to have switched places.

If we look beyond these names to the actual content of their respective Parshiot, we discover that the content of the Parshah that carries the name Vayak'hel would seem to be most appropriately named Pekudei, while the content of the Parshah of Pekudei begs the name Vayak'hel!

Vayak'hel and Pekudei describe the construction and assembly of the Mishkan—the portable Sanctuary built by the people of Israel as a "dwelling for G-d in the physical world." Vayak'hel begins by telling how Moses assembled the people to command them on the observance of Shabbat and the making of the Sanctuary; this act of assembly gives the Parshah its name (*vayak'hel* means "and he assembled" and is a form of the word *kahal*, "congregation"). But the remainder of the Parshah is filled with the particulars of the Mishkan's construction. Each of the Sanctuary's dozens of components is individually listed and described: its roof coverings, wall panels, foundation sockets, pillars, braces, brackets and curtains; the Ark, the Table, the Menorah, the two Altars, even the washbasin and its pedestal. We are given the exact dimensions of these components, the materials out of which they were made, the details of their design.

Pekudei means "accounts," and the Parshah begins with the statement, "These are the accounts of the Mishkan..." The etymological root of Pekudei, *pakod*, means to count, to remember, and to appoint—all expressing the concept of itemization, of particular attention to detail (in modern Hebrew, a *pakid* is a bureaucrat). But while Pekudei also includes details of the Sanctuary's construction (specifically, those of the priestly garments), a major part of the Parshah is devoted to the Mishkan's

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'hel-Pekudei

From the Chassidic Masters

assembly. In Pekudei the Torah relates how the components listed and described in Vayak'hel were fitted together to form the Sanctuary, and how the Divine Presence came to dwell in the completed structure. Indeed, the *parts* of the Mishkan, even as each was fashioned in perfect concurrence with its divine specifications, could not house the Divine Presence until they were assembled to collectively form the whole Mishkan.

In other words, the Parshah of Vayak'hel is taken up with the individual natures of the Sanctuary's parts, while Pekudei describes how these combine to form the greater structure—the very opposite of what each Parshah's name means!

Five Lessons

In light of all the above, let us summarize the various ways in which the concepts of “community” and “individuality” are presented to us by the Torah via the Parshah names Vayak'hel and Pekudei:

- 1) The Torah includes a Parshah called Vayak'hel, and a Parshah called Pekudei.
- 2) On certain years they are joined as a single reading, called “Vayak'hel-Pekudei.”
- 3) On other years, these two Parshiot form two separate Torah-readings, read on separate weeks.
- 4) Vayak'hel means “community,” but the content of this Parshah is the value of individuality. Pekudei means “individuality,” but its content is the advantage in union and integration.
- 5) Vayak'hel comes first in the Torah, followed by Pekudei.

Each of these nuances, says the Rebbe, is significant. Each illuminates the relationship between our individual and communal identities:

The First Lesson: We have and need them both. The fact that the Torah contains two Parshiot, one called Vayak'hel and the other called Pekudei, means that our need for communality and our striving for individual distinction are both important and desirable components of the human soul.

The Second Lesson: We can, and should, achieve a synthesis of the two. If Vayak'hel and Pekudei were only to appear in the Torah as two separate Parshiot, this would imply that while both are necessary, each has its time and place: that there are times when our communality must be emphasized (to the negation of our individuality), and there are times when an assertion of individuality is called for (albeit disruptive to our communality). We would not know that the two could be integrated.

The fact that, on certain years, Vayak'hel and Pekudei are joined to form a single reading, teaches us that we can, and should, achieve a synthesis of the two: a community that is not a faceless mass but a community of individuals, each contributing his or her distinct personality and capabilities toward the communal goal, with the community, in turn, providing the framework within which each can strive for his or her personal best.

The Third Lesson: We must also nurture each of the two as a thing of value in and of itself. On the other hand, if Vayak'hel and Pekudei were to appear *only* in their joint form, this would imply that the only desirable objective is the achievement of some sort of balance between these contrasting drives—a balance that may well entail a compromise of one or the other (or of both). Perhaps our individuality has value only in that it contributes in some way to the community; or perhaps the sole function of the community is to provide a framework for the development of the individual. We would not know that each is also an end unto itself.

The fact that Vayak'hel and Pekudei also appear in the Torah as two *separate* readings teaches us that—in addition to the objective of integrating the two—individuality and community are viable objectives in their own right as well. Individual perfection has value independently of how this contributes to the

which these perfected individuals could be knit into the ideal community.

The Torah, however, places Vayak'hel before Pekudei, teaching us that the very opposite is the case: **our very first objective**, concludes the Rebbe, must be to bring people together, regardless of their individual state. Personal perfection will follow, fostered by the love and fellowship we show towards each other.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'hel-Pekudei

From the Chassidic Masters

communal good; and the creation of a community is likewise an end unto itself, for it represents a state of being that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The Fourth Lesson: Each consists of the other.

We have seen how community (“Vayak’hel”) and individuality (“Pekudei”) each represent a desirable goal, and how they can be integrated to form a third model, a community of individuals (“Vayak’hel-Pekudei”). But the Torah goes even further. It tells us that even when each is considered as an end unto itself, the two are inexorably bound with each other.

This is the lesson to be derived from the fact that the content of “Vayak’hel” is the nature of individual things, while “Pekudei” contains the description of how diverse parts are joined into a greater whole. The Torah is telling us even when the objective is solely the creation of a perfect community, the most perfect community is a community comprised of individuals who are fully in touch with and exercising their individuality (as Vayak’hel, even as a Parshah on its own, is comprised of manifestly individual parts). And the Torah is telling us even when the objective is exclusively the realization of individual potential, an individual can optimally actualize his uniqueness only as a member of a community (as the Parshah of Pekudei *includes* the creation of community).

The Fifth Lesson: Imperfect individuals make a perfect community. The question remaining is: Which should come first?

Logic would seem to dictate that individual development (“Pekudei”) should come before community building (“Vayak’hel”): first one needs the parts, and then one can assemble these parts into the greater organism. So the initial emphasis, it would seem, should be on the perfection of the individual, after

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayak'heil-Pekudei

From the Chassidic Masters

GOOD MORNING

Why are we here?

This, the mother of all questions, is addressed in turn by the various streams of Torah thought, each after its own style.

The Talmud states, simply and succinctly, "I was created to serve my Creator." The moralistic-oriented works of *Mussar* describe the purpose of life as the refinement of one's character traits. The Zohar says that G-d created us "in order that His creations should know Him." Master Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria offered the following reason for creation: G-d is the essence of good, and the nature of good is to bestow goodness. But goodness cannot be bestowed when there is no one to receive it. To this end, G-d created our world — so that there should be recipients of His goodness.

Chassidic teaching explains that these reasons, as well as the reasons given by other kabbalistic and philosophical works, are but the various faces of a singular divine desire for creation, as expressed in the various "worlds" or realms of G-d's creation. Chassidism also offers its own formulation of this divine desire: that we "Make a home for G-d in the material world."

A Home For G-d

What does it mean to make our world a home for G-d?

A basic tenet of our faith is that "the entire world is filled with His presence" and "there is no place void of Him." So it's not that we have to bring G-d into the material world — He is already there. But G-d can be in the world without being at home in it.

Being "at home" means being in a place that is receptive to your presence, a place devoted to serving your needs and desires. It means being in a place where you are your true, private self, as opposed to the

public self you assume in other environments.

The material world, in its natural state, is not an environment hospitable to G-d. If there is one common feature to all things material, it is their intrinsic egocentrism, their placement of the self as the foundation and purpose of existence. With every iota of its mass, the stone proclaims: "I am." In the tree and in the animal, the preservation and propagation of the self is the focus of every instinct and the aim of every achievement. And who more than the human being has elevated ambition to an art and self-advancement to an all-consuming ideal?

The only thing wrong with all this selfishness is that it blurs the truth of what lies behind it: the truth that creation is not an end in itself, but a product of and vehicle for its Creator. And this selfishness is not an incidental or secondary characteristic of our world, but its most basic feature. So to make our world a "home" for G-d we must transform its very nature. We must recast the very foundations of its identity from a self-oriented entity into something that exists for a purpose that is greater than itself.

Every time we take a material object or resource and enlist it in the service of G-d, we are effecting such a transformation. When we take a piece of leather and make a pair of *tefillin* out of it, when we take a dollar bill and give it to charity, when we employ our minds to study a chapter of Torah — we are effecting such a transformation. In its initial state, the piece of leather proclaimed, "I exist"; now it says, "I exist to serve my Creator." A dollar in pocket says, "Greed is good"; in the charity box it says, "The purpose of life is not to receive, but to give." The human brain says, "Enrich thyself"; the brain studying Torah says, "Know thy G-d."

The Frontier of Self

There are two basic steps to the endeavor of making our world a home for G-d. The first step involves priming the material resource as a "vessel for G-dliness": shaping the leather into *tefillin*, donating the money to charity, scheduling time for Torah study. The second step is the actual employment of these "vessels" to serve the divine will: binding the *tefillin* on the arm and head, using the donated money to feed the hungry, studying Torah, etc.

At first glance, it would seem that the second step is the more significant one, while the first step is merely an enabler of the second, a means to its end. But the Torah's account of the first home for G-d built in our world places the greater emphasis on the construction of the "home," rather than its actual employment as a divine dwelling.

A sizable portion of the book of Exodus is devoted to the construction of the Sanctuary built by the children of Israel in the desert. The Torah, which is usually so sparing with words that many of its laws are contained within a single word or letter, is uncharacteristically elaborate. The fifteen materials used in the Sanctuary's construction are listed no less than three times; the components and furnishings of the Sanctuary are listed eight times; and every minute detail of the Sanctuary's construction, down to the dimensions of every wall-panel and pillar and the colors in every tapestry, is spelled out not once, but twice — in the account of G-d's instructions to Moses, and again in the account of the Sanctuary's construction.

All in all, thirteen chapters are devoted to describing how certain physical materials were fashioned into an edifice dedicated to the service of G-d and the training of the *Kohanim* (priests) who were to officiate there. (In contrast, the Torah devotes one chapter to its account of the creation of the universe, three chapters to its description of the revelation at Mount Sinai, and eleven chapters to the story of the Exodus).

The Sanctuary is the model and prototype for all subsequent homes for G-d constructed on physical earth. So the overwhelming emphasis on its "construction" stage (as opposed to the "implementation" stage) implies that in our lives, too, there is something very special about forging our personal resources into things that have the potential to serve G-d. Making ourselves "vessels" for G-dliness is, in a certain sense, a greater feat than actually bringing G-dliness into our lives.

For this is where the true point of transformation lies — the transformation from a self-oriented object to a thing committed to something greater than itself. If G-d had merely desired a hospitable environment, He need not have bothered with a material world; a spiritual world could just as easily have been enlist-

ed to serve Him. What G-d desired was the transformation itself: the challenge and achievement of selfhood transcended and materiality redefined. This transformation and redefinition occurs in the first stage, when something material is forged into an instrument of the divine. The second stage is only a matter of actualizing an already established potential, of putting a thing to its now natural use.

Making Vessels

You meet a person who has yet to invite G-d into his or her life. A person whose endeavors and accomplishments — no matter how successful and laudable — have yet to transcend the self and self-oriented goals.

You wish to expand her horizons — to show him a life beyond the strictures of self. You wish to put on *tefillin* with him, to share with her the divine wisdom of Torah.

But he's not ready yet. You know that the concept of serving G-d is still alien to a life trained and conditioned to view everything through the lens of self. You know that before you can introduce her to the world of Torah and mitzvot, you must first make her receptive to G-dliness, receptive to a life of intimacy with the divine.

So when you meet him on the street, you simply smile and say, "Good morning!" You invite her to your home for a cup of coffee or a Shabbat dinner. You make small talk. You don't, at this point, suggest any changes in his lifestyle. You just want her to become open to you and what you represent.

Ostensibly, you haven't "done" anything. But in essence, a most profound and radical transformation has taken place. The person has become a vessel for G-dliness.

Of course, the purpose of a vessel is that it be filled with content; the purpose of a home is that it be inhabited. The Sanctuary was built to house the presence of G-d. But it is the *making* of vessels for G-dliness that is life's greatest challenge and its most revolutionary achievement.

Based on the teachings of Lubavitcher Rebbe, rendered by Yanki Ta Tauber