

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

*P'kudei 5782*

## The Supreme Value of Integrity

In the Parsha (40:18), we read that Moshe erected the Mishkan. Ramban (40:2) quotes the Midrash Tanchuma to the effect that for the seven days prior to Rosh Chodesh Nissan (when the Mishkan was finally assembled by Moshe), Moshe actually erected and dismantled the Mishkan each day. How may this Midrash be explained?

Ramban suggests that the Leviyim needed to be taught by Moshe how to assemble and disassemble the Mishkan during their sojourn in the desert. However, there might be another explanation. The Torah tells us (36:13) that the Mishkan was one, that it was characterized by absolute integrity, with each element coalescing into one beautiful whole. Apparently, even Moshe had to practice doing it just right, and by the 8th day (Rosh Chodesh Nissan), he succeeded. With this insight, there is a lesson for us as well. It might be called the supreme value of integrity.

The dictionary defines "integrity" as "the state of being whole, entire, or undiminished." In this light, the construction of the Mishkan vessels

revealed this supreme virtue. The Ark was inlaid with gold on its inside and outside. Message: a person's external behavior should reflect his inner self. No hypocrisy, duplicity; no phoniness. Only integrity! The Menorah was carved out of one solid block of gold. No welding together the different parts. Message: a person's character must emerge out of one piece. All parts of the human personality must fit together into one harmonious whole. They must integrate into an impressive wholeness, a completeness that radiates honesty, truth and righteousness.

Putting it somewhat metaphorically, integrity is when the "content of one's character" is properly and carefully arranged into a book which can be read smoothly from cover to cover without contradiction. No wonder some pundit once quipped: "If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don't have integrity, nothing else matters!" And when you have it, when you've worked hard to cultivate it, the reward will come. You will be respected and - even more - you will respect yourself.

The Zohar maintains that the Mishkan was a microcosm of the world. As such, putting our world together begins with integrating our own lives together, and that is no

easy task. To assemble the elements of our character so that, much like the Mishkan, our deeds and behavior reflect this moral attribute of integrity and wholesomeness requires practice and diligence. If Moshe had to work at it, we can do no less. The great Rav Chayim Mi'Volozhin, in his Nefesh HaChayim, makes this very point when he asserts that we are all enjoined to transform ourselves into a reality of Mishkan.

The renowned Rav Yitzchak Hutner zt"l, put it this way. In each of us, a Mishkan awaits to be built, a Mishkan in which G-d yearns to dwell. And much like the Mishkan in the desert, all it takes is integrity!

## **G-d is Everywhere**

Previously, we have spoken of the holiness of time. The Rav also speaks of K'DUSHAT MAKOM, the holiness of place. The Parsha, of course, discusses this type of holiness in dealing with the Mishkan.

The idea is straightforward. Gd is everywhere; He is omnipresent. That said, how is it possible for HaShem - why would HaShem - choose to diminish Himself, as it were, and allow Himself to be confined to a limited space, i.e., the Sanctuary? One of the governing principles in

Lurianic Kabbala is the idea of TZIMTZUM, that is, Gd elects to "reduce" Himself so that He resides in finite space. Why though would Gd choose to behave in such a fashion? The Rav answers as follows. People often assume that Gd is to be found exclusively in ritualistic performances alone: in the Shul, at the Shabbat table, when we recite blessings, etc. Wrong. Sure, when we engage in such activities, the awareness of Gd is clear and palpable. But what about all those other times? What about at the office, in the car, at home, in the market place, on the street? Is Gd to be found there as well?

The Rav put it thusly: "Gd also reveals Himself in the order of nature. One can experience Gd through the blue sky and the flowering bush." The chizuk here is to believe with absolute certainty that HaShem can be accessed anywhere because He is everywhere! When we are in distress, He is there and hurts with us. When we celebrate, Gd is there and rejoices with us. When we are alone, we are not!

This is the profound message of the sanctity of place. The fact that Gd can abide in a small structure proclaims that HaShem is ready to be our companion and friend. It's just up to us to let Him in.

## **Derech Eretz**

The Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, HaRav Dovid Lau, shlita, offers another layer of meaning to the chizuk norm. It has particular relevance as, with this week's Parsha, the traditional declaration of CHAZAK, CHAZAK, V'NIT-CHAZEIK is recited by all.

The Talmud in B'rachos 32b tells us that four activities require chizuk, strengthening and encouragement: Torah, prayer, good deeds, and derech erez. Now, it's this last item that calls for some explanation. With each of the others, the attendant difficulties make chizuk a welcomed necessity. Torah: making the time and not giving up when the learning proves frustrating. Prayer: the need for total focus (kavana) without distractions. Good deeds: especially when it requires sacrifices of time, effort and money. But derech erez?

Rashi defines derech erez as one's job. If so, why should one's occupation require chizuk? True, working is essential if we wish to earn a living and provide for our families, and many times, one's occupation is not particularly exciting. But pragmatic economic pressures should be enough of a reason to get us up each morning and work through the day. What, then, does chizuk mean in this context?

Rav Lau suggested the following based upon a fascinating insight of the great Rav Yisroel Salanter zt"l. The Torah tells us about the saintly tzadik, Chanoch, whom Gd took from this world before his time in order to spare him from the corruption of the Generation of the Flood. The Midrash reveals exactly why Chanoch earned this virtuous reputation. He was a shoemaker who, while working, was able to concentrate on Heavenly matters. Rav Yisroel Salanter asks the obvious: how can one make a good pair of shoes if one's attention is drawn elsewhere?

His answer: The Midrash was really teaching that the greatness of Chanoch was his commitment to make the best possible pair of shoes for his customer and in so doing, it was as if he were contemplating Heavenly matters. Put differently, through such devoted service to his customers, he was sanctifying Gd's Name, and that job-focus placed him on the highest of spiritual levels.

With this meaningful insight, Rav Lau then explains what it means to assert that derech erez also requires chizuk. There are two reasons why one works: to make money and to provide a service. Of course, both reasons are perfectly OK. The only question is, which one has priority, which is the greater value? All too

often, the main reason why people sweat and toil is to make money. Fine. It's a benign selfishness that hurts no one. What the Talmud, however, is telling us is that, as important as wages are, the more noble and superior virtue is to work in order to provide some benefit and utility - medical, legal, product, counsel, etc. - and thus help another human being. To recognize that in your "taking", you are actually "giving", requires a conscious shift of perspective. And that requires chizuk.

And the result? Just imagine how everything changes when the customer - the recipient of your service, your "giving" - gets that message from you, the provider. What appears to be an impersonal commercial affair suddenly transforms into a warm and caring interaction however short that exchange may be.

This is the chizuk behind derech eretz, and, remarkably, it is only on this activity that the Talmud in B'rachot quotes the passage from Shmuel Bet, CHAZAK V'NITCHAZEIK. Why? Perhaps to suggest that when through your work you give chizuk to another, not only he, but you as well are strengthened - V'NITCHAZEIK.