

Bringing meaning to life

Parasha with Rabbi Benji Levy

SHEMOT

VAERA

BO

BESHALACH

YITRO

MISHPATIM

TERUMA

TETZAVEH

KI TISA

VAYAKHEL

PEKUDEI

PEKUDEI

TRANSLATING IDEAS

INTO IDEALS

23

Following the completion of the Tabernacle and its various components, Moses inspects and approves all the work of the Jewish people: ‘...and Moses blessed them’¹ that: ‘God’s Divine Presence should rest in your handiwork.’² However God Himself had already instructed the Jewish people to build His Sanctuary particularly so that He would dwell among them.³ Why therefore does Moses need to bless them with the Divine presence?

In today’s polarised world, there are two fundamental extremes in relation to holiness - that which is holy and that which is not. These two worlds are seen as mutually exclusive and as a result dictate two different sets of conduct.

The world of Torah study, the synagogue and the Shabbat table are on a different orbit so to speak to the world of

academics, business and social enterprise.

For example, many people dress modestly for the former ‘sanctified’ occasions, whereas in the latter ‘secular’ settings, they do not. These external signs reflect a perceived distinction between the two worlds as almost automatically divided.

In Judaism, however, these seemingly disparate worlds are deeply intertwined. And it is our job to reconnect that which has been disconnected.

Judaism is a religion of mountains. The peak of Mount Moriah saw the birth of the world, was the holy setting for Abraham and Isaac’s fateful sacrificial test and was the sacrosanct site where the Holy Temples stood. The peak of Mount Sinai saw the birth of ethical monotheism and objective

law, delivering a message that has completely transformed the moral landscape of the West.

The uniqueness of these mountains is that their message is not limited to their respective sacred summits, but rather the values they embody are predicated upon descent - the translation of their lofty ideas into everyday applicable ideals.

While God had indeed guaranteed His presence in the midst of the Jewish people if they followed His instructions and built His Tabernacle,

Moses nonetheless came to bless them that the sanctity would metaphorically descend the mountain and extend beyond the sanctuary into the handiwork of their day-to-day lives.

Within the world of philosophy there are many conflicting approaches. There are deeply secular philosophies that claim there is no spiritual value in anything and there are deeply religious philosophies that view the spiritual and physical as two completely disparate worlds. Moses' blessing to the Jewish People that the Divine Presence should rest in their handiwork advocates the approach of 'not discrediting the material world of all its value... but to rather elevate everything.'²⁴ Our role is to deepen our awareness of revealed holiness and to constantly seek to reveal deeper holiness in less obvious places.



The Mishna states that 'one who walks on the road and studies, and interrupts his studying to say, "How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this ploughed field!" - scripture considers it as if he has forfeited his life.'²⁵ Ostensibly, it reads that he should not have stopped learning to marvel in his surroundings because those two worlds should be kept separate; however,

what it really seems to be saying is that when one looks at the natural world as disconnected from Torah, one is doing a disservice to the world and a disservice to Torah.

As Ben Bag Bag states, 'delve in it [the Torah] and delve in it, for everything is in it....'²⁶ Just like everything can be found in the Torah, the Torah can be found in everything. Students today need to leave the silos and be exposed to this beauty, so they can live the imperative, 'in all your ways know Him...'²⁷

Through this lens, Moses' blessing is reinforced and perhaps more relevant today than ever before. It is our responsibility to continually seek the Divine within the mundane, create avenues for the holiness to shine through and elevate the material world around us. Through this blessed approach we will succeed in engaging in spiritually focused ideas in the modern tabernacle equivalents and translating and ingraining them into deeply spiritual ideals in our day-to-day handiwork.

Notes

¹ Exodus 39:43.

² Rashi on Exodus 39:43. ³ Exodus 25:8.

⁴ Rav Kook, *Orot*, *Yisrael Vetachito* 5, p. 22.

⁵ *Mishna Avot* 3:9.

⁶ *Mishna Avot* 5:26. ⁷ *Proverbs* 3:6.

In honour of a speedy and complete recovery for our precious daughter

Lital Gila bat Renana Yael

מוקדש לרפואתה

השלמה והמהירה של ביתינו היקרה

ליטל גילה בת רננה יעל

Parasha Fact:

Recent archaeological finds have uncovered what are believed to be priestly garments. A big giveaway is the small cloth balls on the bottom of the robes which serve no functional purpose, but strongly resemble the 'pomegranates' described in the parasha.

Next week in Vayikra:

When assessing the value of physical goods, the measure is relatively simple to gauge. It becomes more complex however when seeking to understand the measure of good deeds and next week we will learn the ancient Torah system.

שבת שלום