

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYAKHEL

Haftarah: Melachim I 7:13-26

FEBRUARY 21-22, 2013

22 ADAR I 5774

DEDICATION: In memory Of Haham Murad Maslaton –

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting this Friday evening is at 5:19 p.m. Mincha at 5:20
SHABBAT 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:43AM

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30

Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom

Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library

Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Kiddush this Shabbat

By David and Gabrielle Frieden in honor of their new baby daughter
Rivka Chaya

And in memory of David's mother
Rivka

Mincha follows Kiddush with amidah not before 12:36 PM

Shabbat Ends – 6:19PM
Return for Arbit – 6:35 PM

Kid's Movie Night follows at 7:15
Pizza and Fun!

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM –
Daily class with Rabbi Colish at 6:30AM

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 5PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

If anyone can join us for Minyan – give us 22 minutes and we'll give you the world to come – we would appreciate it. Through the first week in March when we change the clock we will be moving tefilah to 5PM in order to say mincha and arbit. As a couple of regulars cant join us we would appreciate any help from the outside. If you have friends or relatives who work or live by 59th and 3rd, please pass the word. THANKS

NOTES

I had a great topic to write about this week, but when I put it to paper, it just didn't come out right. I'm not sure if I was simply tired or brain fogged. My cousin Morris commented that I looked like I was in some cloud on Tuesday. So instead of leading with my own article, let's begin with an amazing story of Rabbi Meir Schuster who passed away earlier this week. I was flabbergasted by what I read especially in light of the fact that last year I was approached to assist the Rabbi in raising money for Heritage House. At the time I was so involved in the Sandy aftermath that I couldn't help, but had I heard the whole story, it would have been difficult not to carve some time to help.

I can challenge you that after reading about Rabbi Meir Schuster and a single story on what he meant to just one person, you'll think about what you can do to change the world.

You'll think about reaching out to at least one person, inviting them to dinner, to synagogue, to a class or just to talk. Let me know what you think.
The following article is from matzav.com - Rabbi Meir Schuster zt"l

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of a most remarkable figure in modern Jewish history, Rabbi Meir Schuster zt"l, who was a legend in his time, a man who was a constant, iconic presence at the Kosel for almost forty years, a man who personally and dramatically impacted thousands and thousands of Jewish lives, a man who single-

handedly introduced more Jews to Judaism, quite possibly, than anyone else in Jewish history.

Meir Tzvi Schuster was born on January 22, 1943 to Morris and Mary, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Typical of the Jewish experience at the time, young Meir attended public school. At the age of eleven, his parents enrolled him in Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski's afternoon Hebrew School. Rabbi Twerski took a personal interest in helping Meir catch up to the other students and the two formed a close bond.

After two years, in 1958, Meir went to study at the Yeshiva in Skokie, Illinois - Bais Medrash L'Torah. Two years later, he transferred to Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, Maryland, where Rabbi Schuster stood out as someone who was passionately devoted to Torah study, to tefillah and to mitzvah observance.

Each morning, Reb Meir would wake his fellow students in the dorm, calling out, "Wake up. Wake up. It's time to serve Hashem!" He was also a talented artist, and together with his friend Chaim Kass, who was a sofer, he created a number of beautiful kesubos.

On Shabbas, Reb Meir spent the entire day studying in the bais medrash with a box of dates or figs at his side. With the exception of davening and Torah discussions, he did not speak - Shabbos was reserved exclusively for spirituality. Rabbi Shlomo Porter, the founder of Etz Chaim in Baltimore, still remembers the intensity with which Reb Meir would recite the Birkas Hamazon after eating. Indeed, anyone who ever saw Rabbi Schuster daven at the Kosel, or anywhere else, couldn't help but see that he was engaged in an intense, personal encounter with his Creator.

The Kosel

Rabbi Schuster and his Rebbetzin, the former Esther Garfinkle of Monticello, New York, were married in 1967, six months after the Six Day War. Three months later, in March 1968, they went to Israel, for a year of Torah study in the Mir Yeshiva. As if to foreshadow the kind of impact the Schusters would eventually have on so many young Jews, they decided to extend their stay - for four decades. The Schusters settled in the Ezras Torah neighborhood of Yerushalayim and had four children.

Not long after moving to Israel, Rabbi Schuster and his old friend Chaim Kass were at the Kosel where they saw a young man wearing a backpack who was obviously deeply touched by his encounter with the Wall. Reb Chaim went over to the young man and asked if he would be interested in learning about

Judaism, and the young man responded that he was. Unbeknownst to anyone at the moment, that young man who had been moved to tears at the Kosel, represented the beginning of a revolution. For the next two weeks, Reb Meir and Reb Chaim kept returning to the Kosel to try to interest more people in exploring Judaism.

By nature, Rabbi Schuster was particularly quiet and reserved, an introvert not naturally given to conversation, and so Reb Chaim initially did the talking. Within a couple of weeks, however, Rabbi Schuster began to take the lead, and he never, ever looked back.

Rabbi Schuster, in his unassuming yet confident way, would walk up to people and begin by engaging them with the simplest of questions: "Are you Jewish?" "Do you know what time it is?" These questions became doorways to conversations that eventually led to other questions; "Have you ever experienced a Shabbos meal?" "Would you like to meet a wise man?"

And so Rabbi Schuster would meet people - first dozens, then hundreds and eventually thousands - and he would arrange for them to be hosted for a Shabbos meal, or to take their first taste of Judaism at Aish HaTorah, Ohr Somayach, Neve Yerushalayim, Dvar Yerushalayim, the Diaspora Yeshiva or wherever he felt was the appropriate place for that particular young man or woman. For forty years, day in and day out - day after day and night after night - Rabbi Meir Schuster was a fixture at the Kosel.

In time, Friday night and Shabbos at the Kosel became synonymous with Rabbi Meir Schuster. (He was later joined by Jeff Seidel.) All week long, Rabbi Schuster would meet people, and if he couldn't interest them in studying, he would urge them to meet him back at the Kosel on Friday night so that he could arrange for them to have a Shabbos dinner at someone's home. And so, every Friday night at the Kosel, after davening was concluded, Rabbi Schuster would round up a handful of people, or a dozen - sometimes, several dozen - and escort them thru the streets of Yerushalayim to families who were awaiting their special guests.

As the years passed, it wasn't uncommon to see Rabbi Schuster, his son Duvi, and a volunteer or two surrounded by twenty, thirty, forty people waiting to experience Shabbos. Indeed, long before the Internet, almost any young person who was traveling to Israel eventually heard through the grapevine that if they wanted a Shabbos meal in Yerushalayim, all

they had to do was hang out at the Kosel and Rabbi Schuster would find them.

Heritage House & Shorashim Heritage Centers
In 1985, Rabbi Schuster founded the Heritage House youth hostel in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Yerushalayim. This was in response to his great pain at meeting young people staying in youth hostels in the Christian and Moslem Quarters of the Old City. He was a tireless visionary who raised all the necessary funds and hired a dedicated and talented staff to transform this new dream into a vibrant reality.

Over the years, Heritage House has provided tens of thousands of visitors with a unique place to stay, and if they choose, to also experience the introduction to Judaism classes, or Shabbos and Yom Tov programs that are available through the Heritage House. Like Rabbi Schuster himself, Heritage House became a Yerushalayim landmark.

But then came the intifada of 2000. The wave of terror attacks almost dried up the number of tourists who were visiting the Kosel. Instead of using this slow period for some much needed rest and relaxation, Rabbi Schuster launched a new, ambitious venture-Shorashim Heritage Centers, for young secular Israelis to learn about their Heritage. The first center was opened in the heart of Yerushalayim's downtown district, with subsequent centers in Herzaliya, Haifa, Modiin and Pardes Chana. Rabbi Schuster again shouldered the burden of raising all the funds and assembled a team of dynamic educators who speak the language of Israeli youth. Within ten years after opening the first center, over 50,000 young people had their first taste of Jewish wisdom and spirituality in a warm, open, non-threatening atmosphere. To date, through Shorashim, over 300 couples have met, married and begun to build vibrant Jewish families.

His Illness

At the age of 65, still operating with the kind of dauntless energy and determination that would exhaust a young man, Rabbi Schuster suddenly began to exhibit worrisome symptoms. Soon it became clear that something was terribly wrong. Rabbi Schuster was diagnosed with Lewy Body, a disease with debilitating symptoms similar to Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. The progression of the disease was rapid and debilitating. Yet, true to form, Rabbi Schuster wouldn't stop. He pushed to his outer most limits and beyond-still seeking out Jews who were estranged from Judaism, still seeking out someone for whom one Shabbos

meal could forever change their destiny-until he could push no more.

His Legacy

How many people did Rabbi Schuster introduce to Judaism? How many married a fellow Jew because of his hostels? How many people experienced their only taste of Shabbos because of him? How many people had their first Shabbos and then went on to live rich Jewish lives because of him? How many children and grandchildren of these people are now in Jewish day schools and yeshivos? The number is impossible to know, and the ramifications of all his efforts are literally beyond comprehension.

Yehi zichro boruch.

Shalom Schwartz's Story: By Shalom Schwartz

It was February 1974. I was four and a half months into my six month Kibbutz Ulpan program at Ein Dor, a shomer hatzair kibbutz, near Tiberias in northern Israel. I worked extra days on the kibbutz prior to our program's Jerusalem trip to be able to stay on afterwards in Jerusalem for a long weekend.

The trip included a visit to the Kotel. Everyone was given some time on their own and told when we should return back to the bus to depart. I was not into "holy" places so I checked out the archaeological digs nearby instead, and returned to the bus. We were about to leave and everyone was asked to check if anyone had not yet returned. Sure enough, my roommate was missing so I headed out to the Kotel area to retrieve him.

As I came closer, I saw him in conversation with a tall man in a black hat and suit. I walked behind the man, and signaled my friend that the bus was leaving and that we had to go. Reb Meir turned around and began a conversation.

"Where are you from?"

"Canada"

"Where? Toronto?"

"Yeah, but excuse us we actually have a bus waiting for us; sorry no time to talk."

I start walking away with my friend. Reb Meir is walking with us.

"Do you know Yeshivas Ner Yisrael?"

"Look, we really have no time for this conversation and besides I didn't understand those Hebrew words you said."

"Yeshiva...the Rabbinical College in Toronto...have you been there?"

"No I told you I don't know what you're talking about. I have never heard that word "yeshiva". And we really have to go...."

I start walking away faster. Reb Meir keeps pace.

"It's on Finch Avenue. Do you know where Finch Avenue is?"

"Yes I do know where Finch Avenue is but that connection really doesn't make me interested in what you're selling. We really have to run....."

"I'm not selling anything. I was just telling your friend that if he was looking for a place to stay in Jerusalem that he could stay for free at a yeshiva and listen to a class or two on Jewish philosophy."

He now had my attention...I had been planning to stay for a few days in Jerusalem and that morning I had asked at the reception desk of the youth hostel we were staying at if they had room for the coming days. They had said that another group was coming in and there was no room available.

"For free? What's the catch?"

"No catch; it's just an opportunity to learn something about Judaism."

"I'm not interested...we have to run; a whole group of people is waiting for us.

Stop following us, we must go!"

He wrote out his name and phone number and said that I could phone him anytime I like. I cautiously took the paper and quickly boarded the bus with a sigh of relief.

That night, I tried to reach a list of youth hostels to see if they had room. They were either full, their lines were busy, or no one answered. I pulled out the paper I had received and stared at it. I was hesitant but reminded myself that one of the main reasons I had been drawn to Israel was to figure out this Jewish thing. Am I a Jew? What does it mean? Do I want any relationship to this empty religious identity that has been such a confusing burden or choose to finally get rid of it?

I dialed the number.

"Just one class and I can sleep over?"

"Okay. Meet me at 8:45 at Damascus gate tomorrow morning."

"Okay."

Reb Meir escorted me to a class of Rav Noach Weinberg zt"l who was then Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Samayach. I was shuffled into the class and listened for 2 hours to inspiring wisdom that I never imagined existed in Judaism.

My life had been changed forever.

I spent 3 days being asked probing and challenging questions and asking a few of my own. I decided to go back and then finish my Hebrew Ulpan Program a couple weeks early to invest 2 weeks in figuring out this Jewish thing and then moving on with my travel plans and my life. Reb Meir personally wrote me while I was back on the kibbutz, like a good friend, to make sure I kept my commitment. Two weeks at Ohr Sameyach became 3 months and then seven years at Aish HaTorah.

My parents, my brothers, my family, my wife, my children and grandchildren; my students and students' students all have enormous gratitude to Rav Meir and his family. I have always stood in awe of his mesirus nefesh for Am Yisrael, and his example of what a caring Jew can accomplish.

Today Friday is the 21st of Adar Aleph. It is the Yahrzeit of my father's rabbi, Rabbi Murad Maslaton. Last Friday I went to the cemetery in Staten Island to look at the stones in order to get a better feel in designing a stone for our father. You see our dad was the guy who designed everyone else's stone so we had no idea to what to create. It was the first time I had been to a cemetery alone. And there was plenty of snow and ice. Coincidentally I took a flop and it Rabbi Murad Maslaton's stone that I caught – see image -. When Albert Levy reminded me that tonight is the Rabbi's yahrzeit, I decided to add an article and some photos.



A

**Great Leader
by Sarina Roffé**

Rabbi Murad Maslaton was the beloved rabbi for the Ahi Ezer community, in Brooklyn, New York and Damascus, Syria. Born in 1876 in Damascus to Joseph and Rebecca Maslaton, Murad was one of seven children, four boys and three girls. His brother Jacob Tarab Maslaton was the Chief Rabbi of Damascus and Beirut.

Rabbi Murad Maslaton taught Hebrew and Arabic for two decades to Jewish boys and girls at the French High School "Alliance Israelite." While teaching, he also served as cantor for the Hebrat Adi Ezer Congregation in Damascus, where his brother Jacob was the spiritual leader.

By 1920 many Syrian Jews were leaving, or had left, Damascus for America and the promise of a better future. In the years following World War I, many more left Syria and settled in New York's Lower East Side. Unaccepted by their Ashkenazic brethren and unable to understand their Yiddish and strange dialect of Hebrew, these Damascene Jews needed a spiritual leader.

Rabbi Murad Maslaton was persuaded to come to America and lead the Hebrat Ahi Ezer Congregation on the East Side. Under his leadership, the congregation grew and flourished, moving to Bensonhurst into a private house on 64th Street converted into a k'nis. By 1951, the congregation moved into a newly constructed building complete with social hall and a magnificent sanctuary on 71st Street.

Intent on educating the children in the growing community, the rabbi began a Talmud Torah, teaching from 50 to 100 children himself. He was so dedicated to educating the children in Torah, he worked from morning until night, winter and summer, Saturday afternoons and on Sundays as well.



According to his son, Rabbi Sion Maslaton, of the Ahi Ezer Torah Center, his father often missed meals unless his mother or one of his siblings brought food to the synagogue for him.

Rabbi Murad Maslaton was kept busy learning Torah or teaching it to others. After morning minyan, he would often discuss commentary with those who remained. He did the same on Saturday afternoons, as many came to hear him speak.

The rabbi is also remembered for composing beautiful songs for bar mitzvahs and weddings and other happy occasions. He wrote eulogies for the deceased and shared in both happy and sad occasions for members of the community.

Many people came to him when they had problems. The rabbi was very modest, sincere, and objective, not favoring one side of a dispute or the other; always treating everyone alike.

Rabbi Sion Maslaton tells this story of his father:

"A lot of people used to come to him with their problems. He had a special reading for them and a lot of them saw the light. One time when my father was in Florida, a man asked him to bless his tree because it was not bearing fruit. My father blessed the tree and it began yielding fruit. Another time someone came and said his son was two or three years old and couldn't talk. My father blessed and he grew and he talks more than anyone."

On Shabbat and on holidays, Rabbi Maslaton always insisted on sharing the meal with others, the first to invite visitors or strangers who visited the shul. His wife welcomed visitors with open arms, preparing enough tasty food for a king.

Rabbi Murad Maslaton also wrote many works, including an interpretation of the Holy Bible with his brother Jacob.

The esteemed and dignified rabbi served Ahi Ezer Congregation for 40 years, passing on in 1959. He is remembered by the entire Ahi Ezer community and his seven children, three boys and four girls.

And finally Editors Notes Emulating G-d

I want to extend my appreciation, on behalf of our entire family to the many of you who went out of your way to pay respects in memory of my father last week at the Sheloshim in Ahi Ezer in Brooklyn. It was

very meaningful for us and gave many who came a bit of insight into what type of person my father was.

Some weeks back I mentioned in the Synagogue that if my father could identify with any biblical figure, I thought it would be Besalel, the young artisan who was responsible for creating the mishkan and all the vessels. Although my father was a man of many skills, he had a tremendous attraction towards working with his hands. But the attraction had to do with building the physical which might contain some aspect of the spiritual/

In the factory on McDonald Avenue, he had a large personal work bench. On that bench he rarely worked on furniture or chairs. His true love was in restoring and creating pieces of our communal Judaica. At any time the table would be covered with Sefer Torah cases in various stages of repair, with Arabian style perfume bottles used for pouring besamim and parts of multi-tiered trays to hold candles, flowers and coins called a Senee-eh of Elijah which was used at Brit Milah ceremonies. None of these were his. He would design, fabricate and engrave on behalf of the community. This was his love.

In fact at the sheloshim, Chantelle returned to the Synagogue one of the silver engraved perfume bottles made by my father that Chantelle was given during the Shibah to restore. And when we left the Synagogue they gave her a Torah case dedicated by my great grandfather in memory of his wife who passed away in 1903 which had been restored at one time by my father and was now badly damaged by a recent break in a water pipe. To me it was beyond repair, but my wife's not afraid of anything. Chantelle and my dad shared a special artistic bond, they also shared birthdays – strangely enough both their Jewish and secular birthdays were on the same day. The name Besalel can be broken down into Besel Kel, in the shadow of G-d. And some suggest Beselem Elokim, "in the image of G-d". It's remarkable that the man selected to execute the design of G-d's so to say dwelling place on earth bears a name which reminds us of G-d's creation of the world or so to say the dwelling place of man, and His creation of man in His image. Creation of the World and Creation of the Mishkan are two sides of the same coin (with Shabbat as their common denominator – but that's a whole separate class).

I recall discussing the details of the Kodosh HaKodashim – the Holy of Holies - with Rabbi Abittan and how the ark with the staves would not even fit into the room given the dimensions. We discussed the use of Cherubs which given the commandment against graven images are difficult to understand. I

understood that the Holy of Holies was in many ways a heavenly embassy on earth. Although the building was physically on earth, being within the room meant that someone was in many ways far, far away. Another way of understanding it was as a portal to another dimension.

The Torah dedicates so many portions to the Tabernacle, the material, the construction and the instructions. According to Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah, the sages understood the Mishkan to be a microcosm of the universe, with each of its aspects corresponding to another part of creation: the tent represented the heavens, the menorah represented the sun and moon, the laver (anointing oil and incense) represented the oceans, the wood representing the soil of the earth; each revealed in the Mishkan as all aspects of the world are revealed in the creation story.

Midrash Rabba goes on and elaborates how the construction of the Mishkan relates to the six days of creation.

Regarding the work of the first day of creation, it says, "He who stretches out the heavens like a curtain" (Psalms 104:2). Regarding the making of the Mishkan it says, "And you shall make curtains of goat's hair for a tent over the Tabernacle" (Exodus 26:7).

Regarding the work of the second day of creation, it says, "Let there be a firmament... and let it divide between the waters and the waters" (Genesis 1:6). Regarding the making of the Mishkan it says, "And the veil shall divide for you between the Holy and the Holy of Holies" (Exodus 26:33).

Regarding the work of the third day of creation, it says, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together" (Genesis 1:9). Regarding the making of the Mishkan it says, "And you shall make a copper basin, and the base thereof of copper, for washing" (Exodus 30: 18).

Regarding the work of the fourth day of creation, it says, "Let there be luminaries in the heavens" (Genesis 1:14). Regarding the making of the Mishkan it says, "And you shall make a Menorah of pure gold" (Exodus 25:31).

Regarding the work of the fifth day of creation, it says, "Let fowl fly above the earth" (Gen. 1:20). Regarding the making of the Mishkan it says, "The cherubim shall spread out their wings upward" (Exodus 25:20).

On the sixth day man was created [to inhabit and cultivate the earth]. Regarding the Mishkan, G-d says

to Moses, "Bring near Aaron your brother [to perform the service in the Sanctuary]" (Exodus. 28:1).

Of the seventh day we have it written, "And the heaven and the earth were completed... And G-d completed His work... and G-d blessed... and G-d sanctified... " (Genesis 2:1-3). Regarding the making of the Mishkan it says: "Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle... And Moses blessed them... And it came to pass on the day that Moses completed the Tabernacle... and sanctified it" (Exodus 39:32-43; Numbers 7:1).

Man was created in G-d's image, we were created to emulate Him. As G-d is kind, so must we be kind. As G-d is merciful so must we be merciful. And as G-d has created a place for us, he allows us to create a place for Him.

But what do we do in a world without a Mishkan; a world without a Mikdash? I believe we can build a Mishkan in our homes and a Mikdash in our Synagogues and Schools. We can exercise our G-dly role in perfecting the world in our own environments. We can do that by beautifying them both physically and spiritually. By building them with Holiness, we can achieve what G-d asked of us initially.

And they will make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them.

My dad was like Besalel. He strived to create a more beautiful world physically and spiritually. He strived to provide places for people to come together, to pray, to learn, to eat and to live. He strived to emulate Hashem in being kind and caring. And he taught us to do the same. G-d is where He is invited.

I keep thinking of the movie, A Field of Dreams. I guess the lesson to all of us is. If you build it He will come. We can all be Besalel. We can all exercise our aspect of being in the image of G-d. That's if we want to. Let's get together and build it!

PS ... And to those of you who noted the request last week to locate an apartment for us by Porto Vita for Passover ... thanks for trying, but still no luck. If you know of anyone who might be selling their apartment and would be open to renting or who will be away on the Passover Trip or in Brooklyn or Deal who can make an apartment available, please let us know at davidbibi@gmail.com. Here you don't need to build it, just tell us about it! Shabbat Shalom ...

Shabbat Shalom
David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd Aliyot: The Parsha begins with the Mitzvah of Shabbos and the penalty for her transgression. Note that Pasuk 35:5 is classic proof of the Oral Law. Those who deny the Oral Law must explain the literal translation of this verse to prohibit having any burning flame on Shabbos. This would forbid the use of lights, heat, and even Shabbos candles! It is the Oral Law which teaches us that the G-d's prohibition was directed at lighting a fire, not having a fire. Moshe asked the Bnai Yisroel to donate the time, talents, and materials for the construction of the Mishkan [Tabernacle]. The Bnai Yisroel responded with unbridled enthusiasm.

3rd, 4th, & 5th Aliyot Talents and materials were donated and Betzallel and Oholiav were appointed as chief architects and artists. The response to Moshe's appeal was so great that Moshe had to command the people to stop their donations! (see, miracles do happen!) The outer coverings of the Mishkan and the inner tapestries are detailed. The beams of the Mishkan, the Aron Hakodesh, and the Shulchan - Table are described.

6th & 7th Aliyot The Menorah and the inner Golden Altar are described. The outer ramped Altar, the Washstand, and the Mishkan's surrounding enclosure are detailed.

THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Besalel...He filled him with G-dly spirit, with wisdom and with every craft.” (Shemot 35:30-31)

Besalel was filled with a tremendous gift of wisdom. He used this gift to be the main builder of the Mishkan. He was able to coordinate and craft all of the amazing artwork of the Mishkan. What brought about that he should be on the receiving end of this Divine present?

Rabbi David Kaplan explains that it is well known that Hashem conducts the world with the principle of midah k'neged midah, which means that Hashem pays back measure for measure. With this in mind, the Meshech Hochmah explains that it is quite logical for Besalel to have been the one who received this blessing. You see, it was Besalel's ancestors from the tribe of Nahshon ben Aminadav who were willing to sacrifice themselves and jump into the Red Sea.

Now, in order to sacrifice oneself, one cannot do much thinking. If one thinks too much, one may very well come up with reasons why one does not really have to be so selfless under those

circumstances. The people from the tribe of Yehudah did not think their way out of it. They just did it.

But that was not all. It was Hur, Besalel's grandfather, who at the incident of the Golden Calf, sacrificed his life in his attempt to put a stop to the terrible sin. So since Besalel's ancestors acted without trying to be too smart, measure for measure it resulted in their descendant being granted a high degree of wisdom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"He made the washbasin of copper...from the mirrors of the legions" (Shemot 38:8)

The washbasin was made from the copper mirrors which the women donated to the Mishkan. Even though Moshe hesitated to use mirrors used to beautify women for something so sublime as the Mishkan, Hashem told him that this was very dear in His eyes. The women used to beautify themselves in order to restore the spirits of their downtrodden husbands in Egypt, and thus they were able to be fruitful and multiply. Hashem said that this is very precious to Him and should be used for the washbasin.

What connection is there between a washbasin and mirrors? Every time a kohen would do the service in the Mishkan, he had to purify himself by washing his hands and feet. When he saw the mirrors in the washbasin, he would undoubtedly look at his reflection in the mirror. This would allow him to purify his spiritual self by causing him to observe himself and remember which traits he would have to cleanse within himself. So the copper mirrors enabled the kohen not only to wash his hands and feet but also wash out any impurities of his character. This was especially important since he was about to serve the rest of the Jewish people and he might have been tempted to see negative traits in others. He was now reminded to rectify his own traits before judging others.

Whenever we leave the house we look at the mirror to see if we are presentable. We should learn this lesson and also look at our flaws in the "mirror" before going out into the world and seeing other people. This will put us in a better perspective to see only the good in others. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

T

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Avoiding "Fire" on Shabbat

Parashat Vayakhel begins with Moshe assembling Beneh Yisrael and conveying to them the command to observe Shabbat, singling out in particular the prohibition against lighting fires on Shabbat: "Do not kindle a fire in any of your residences on the day of Shabbat." Many commentators raised the question of why this specific prohibition was singled out from

among all the many prohibitions that apply on Shabbat. Why did Moshe make particular mention of the prohibition against kindling a fire?

One of the answers that have been suggested is that Moshe actually refers here to the "fire" of anger. He warns us in this Pasuk of the need to avoid anger on Shabbat.

Medically, it has been shown that anger poses grave danger to the human body, and can cause high blood pressure, ulcers and other serious maladies. Spiritually, our Hachamim teach that nothing is more harmful and destructive for the soul than anger. And on Shabbat, we are especially prone to becoming angry. During the week, the family members are busy with their personal schedules and do not have much time to sit with each other, whereas on Shabbat, everyone is together in close quarters for an extended period of time. This offers a beautiful opportunity for bonding and meaningful interaction, but also allows for fighting and arguments. This is true in communal life, as well. The biggest crowd in the synagogue the whole week is, of course, on Shabbat. This is a beautiful opportunity for harmonious congregational prayer and study, but can also create tension and stress which could precipitate fighting. Shabbat thus offers us the opportunity for spiritual greatness, but also poses the risk of spiritual destruction by putting people close together and making them prone to anger.

An even greater threat, though, arises in the hours before Shabbat, on Friday afternoon. Especially in the winter months, when Shabbat begins early Friday afternoon, these hours are a very tense and pressured time. There's a lot to get done, and people are anxious. And, while I have not conducted a scientific survey on the subject, I would venture to guess that the majority of household problems happen to take place on Friday. It seems like it's always Friday when the shirt is missing a button or the oven breaks. If we took a survey of community plumbers, I imagine we would hear of a disproportionately large number of leaks, bursts and boiler breakdowns specifically on Fridays. This is the Satan trying to interfere with the beauty and spiritual benefits of Shabbat. He finds ways to get people nervous and agitated which in turn causes them to become angry and shout at one another, so that the family sits down at the table upset, aggravated, and not at all interested in sharing a beautiful Shabbat experience together.

"Do not kindle a flame in any of your residences on the day of Shabbat." We are instructed to do everything we can to avoid this pitfall and make

Shabbat the day of peace and serenity that it is supposed to be.

One recommendation is to have everything for Shabbat prepared early on Friday afternoon, well in advance of the onset of Shabbat, to avoid the last minute pressures that can cause a raging "fire" of strife and tension.

The story is told of a couple that was childless for many years, until they finally had a son. Unfortunately, however, the child developed a severe heart condition, and they brought him to the best doctor available, in Vilna. After examining the child, the doctor informed the parents there was nothing he could do. On their way home, somebody advised them to stop off in Radin and receive a blessing from the Hafetz Haim. The great Sage instructed that every week they should have everything for Shabbat prepared and ready at midday on Friday, and they committed to following this instruction. When they brought their child back to the doctor in Vilna, he told them that the child must have received a new heart, because it was fully healed.

If the President of the United States tells us he's joining us for dinner, we would ensure to have everything perfectly prepared in time. On Friday night, Hashem Himself comes to our homes. It would terribly disrespectful not to have everything ready. Understandably, this could be very difficult during the winter when Shabbat starts very early. But throughout the rest of the year, at very least, we have no excuse for a last-minute rush on Friday afternoon. Friday should not be the time for long leisurely trips and recreational activities. Ereb Shabbat is the time for preparing for our special "Guest," and the earlier we prepare, the calmer we would be so we can avoid the destructive "fire" that, when kindled, can take away all the spiritual treasures that Shabbat offers us.

Rabbi Wein On Becoming Left Handed

While walking on a darkened street here in Jerusalem near my home last week while having an animated conversation with my wife over the frustration of the world's treatment of Israel, the Jews and Judaism, I neglected to look where I was going and tripped over a curb and fell heavily on my arm. Eventually I was diagnosed as having a crack or chip in one of the bones of the elbow. Originally, I was placed in a cast which I found to be most cumbersome and uncomfortable. I therefore decided to go for a second opinion. The new doctor removed the cast and placed my arm in a sling. This is a much more comfortable and bearable condition though my

right arm remains pretty much unusable. I have had to become much more dependent on my left arm, something which I am not accustomed to and not extremely adept at.

This magnificent piece of prose is possible not because I can type on my computer with my left-hand but rather because I have a voice dictation program which allows me to type, so to speak, in a hands-free fashion. But there are many other things that I simply cannot do with my left hand. I am therefore humbled by having to rely on others to do such mundane acts as buttoning my shirt and coat, tying my shoelaces and other daily tasks, the description of which I will leave to your imagination. The fact that I cannot by myself wrap my tefillin around my arm alone and am required to have a number of kind and generous souls to help me in this holy task is most sobering to me. I have always prided myself on being an independent person and I have deluded myself to believe that I am self-sufficient in every way. The Lord has shown me that that was a thought of hubris and unwarranted belief in one's self.

In a book on physics that I once read, the learned professor stated that eighty-five percent of molecules suspended in space at random will flow to the right. What he found most interesting about this phenomenon is that it approximated the ratio of right-handed to left-handed people in the world. There is no doubt of the fact that God's world favors the right-handed. Just ask any left-handed person how he or she feels when seated in the middle of a dining table surrounded by all right-handed guests. In certain sports there is a premium paid to left-handed athletes. This seems to be true in baseball and perhaps also in tennis. But for most of the activities of the human race the right-handed person is preferred and the world and its gadgets are constructed to accommodate this majority. Since I am temporarily left-handed I am at a complete disadvantage because my left hand is not my dominant hand and thus I am in reality a right-handed left-handed person. None of the gadgets in my house are built for such a creature and therefore my helplessness has sorely bruised my otherwise healthy ego.

I have gained a new insight as to why we right-handed people lay our tefillin on our left hand – our weaker hand. Why the Torah wanted us to place tefillin on the weaker hand instead of the stronger hand is most perplexing. After all tefillin is meant to remind us of the holiness of our service to God, of our loyalty to Torah and of the eternal concept of reward and punishment that exists in God's universe. As such, should it not be that our dominant hand – our strong hand, the one that we can accomplish so

much with – should have the tefillin wrapped around it? But that is as I have ruefully learned the necessity for the employment of one's weaker hand in the service of God and in life is in itself a very necessary lesson. By using our weaker hand as the base for our tefillin we therefore signify to ourselves and to our Creator that even our stronger hand is in reality weak and fragile. The Torah constantly strives to remind us of our true condition – of how fragile we are and how dependent we are on God's goodness and constant support. Our weaker hand also reminds us of the necessity of family, society, community and the presence and help of good and compassionate people. I do not recommend injuring one's elbow in order to learn these lessons. Nevertheless there is something to be learned from all experiences in life and therefore the words of the rabbis that "all that Heaven decrees is for the good" applies even to the happenings of clumsy rabbis.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

How do you remotivate a demoralized people? How do you put the pieces of a broken nation back together again? That was the challenge faced by Moses in this week's parsha.

The key word here is *vayakhel*, "Moses gathered." *Kehillah* means community. A *kehillah* or *kahal* is a group of people assembled for a given purpose. That purpose can be positive or negative, constructive or destructive. The same word that appears at the beginning of this week's parsha as the beginning of the solution, appeared in last week's parsha as the start of the problem: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered [*vayikahel*] around Aaron and said, 'Make us a god to lead us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'"

The difference between the two kinds of *kehillah* is that one results in order, the other in chaos. Coming down the mountain to see the golden calf, we read that "Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies." The verb *ערפ*, like the similar *ארפ*, means "loose, unbridled, unrestrained."

There is an assembly that is disciplined, task-oriented and purposeful. And there is an assembly that is a mob. It has a will of its own. People in crowds lose their sense of self-restraint. They get carried along in a wave of emotion. Normal deliberative thought-processes become bypassed by the more primitive feelings or the group. There is, as neuroscientists put it, an "amygdala hijack." Passions run wild.

There have been famous studies of this: Charles Mackay's *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the*

Madness of Crowds (1841), Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: a study of the popular mind* (1895), and Wilfred Trotter's *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (1914). One of the most haunting works on the subject is Jewish Nobel prize-winner Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1960, English translation 1962). Vayakhel is Moses' response^[1] to the wild abandon of the crowd that gathered around Aaron and made the golden calf. He does something fascinating. He does not oppose the people, as he did initially when he saw the golden calf. Instead, he uses the same motivation that drove them in the first place. They wanted to create something that would be a sign that God was among them: not on the heights of a mountain but in the midst of the camp. He appeals to the same sense of generosity that made them offer up their gold ornaments. The difference is that they are now acting in accordance with God's command, not their own spontaneous feelings. He asks the Israelites to make voluntary contributions to the construction of the Tabernacle, the Sanctuary, the Mikdash. They do so with such generosity that Moses has to order them to stop. If you want to bond human beings so that they act for the common good, get them to build something together. Get them to undertake a task that they can only achieve together, that none can do alone.

The power of this principle was demonstrated in a famous social-scientific research exercise carried out in 1954 by Muzafer Sherif and others from the University of Oklahoma, known as the Robbers' Cave experiment. Sherif wanted to understand the dynamics of group conflict and prejudice. To do so, he and his fellow researchers selected a group of 22 white, eleven-year-old boys, none of whom had met one another before. They were taken to a remote summer camp in Robbers Cave State Park, Oklahoma. They were randomly allocated into two groups.

Initially neither group knew of the existence of the other. They were staying in cabins far apart. The first week was dedicated to team-building. The boys hiked and swam together. Each group chose a name for itself – they became The Eagles and the Rattlers. They stenciled the names on their shirts and flags. Then, for four days they were introduced to one another through a series of competitions. There were trophies, medals and prizes for the winners, and nothing for the losers. Almost immediately there was tension between them: name-calling, teasing, and derogatory songs. It got worse. Each burned the other's flag and raided their cabins. They objected to eating together with the others in the same dining hall.

Stage 3 was called the 'integration phase'. Meetings were arranged. The two groups watched films together. They lit Fourth-of-July firecrackers together.

The hope was that these face-to-face encounters would lessen tensions and lead to reconciliation. They didn't. Several broke up with the children throwing food at one another.

In stage 4, the researchers arranged situations in which a problem arose that threatened both groups simultaneously. The first was a blockage in the supply of drinking water to the camp. The two groups identified the problem separately and gathered at the point where the blockage had occurred. They worked together to remove it, and celebrated together when they succeeded.

In another, both groups voted to watch some films. The researchers explained that the films would cost money to hire, and there was not enough in camp funds to do so. Both groups agreed to contribute an equal share to the cost. In a third, the coach on which they were travelling stalled, and the boys had to work together to push it. By the time the trials were over, the boys had stopped having negative images of the other side. On the final bus ride home, the members of one team used their prize money to buy drinks for everyone.

Similar outcomes have emerged from other studies. The conclusion is revolutionary. You can turn even hostile factions into a single cohesive group so long as they are faced with a shared challenge that all can achieve together but none can do alone.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, former President of Yeshiva University, once remarked that he knew of only one joke in the Mishnah, the statement that "Scholars increase peace in the world" (Berakhot 64a). Rabbis are known for their disagreements. How then can they be said to increase peace in the world?

I suggest that the passage is not a joke but a precisely calibrated truth. To understand it we must read the continuation: "Scholars increase peace in the world as it is said, 'All your children shall be learned of the Lord and great will be the peace of your children' (Isaiah 54: 13). Read not 'your children' but 'your builders.'" When scholars become builders they create peace. If you seek to create a community out of strongly individualistic people, you have to turn them into builders. That is what Moses did in Vayakhel.

Team-building, even after a disaster like the golden calf, is neither a mystery nor a miracle. It is done by setting the group a task, one that speaks to their passions and one no subsection of the group can achieve alone. It must be constructive. Every member of the group must be able to make a unique contribution and then feel that it has been valued. Each must be able to say, with pride: I helped make this.

That is what Moses understood and did. He knew that if you want to build a team, create a team that builds.