

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYAKHEL/SHEKALIM

Haftarah: Melachim II 11:17 - 12:17

MARCH 5, 2016 25 ADAR I 5776

**Rosh Hodesh Adar II will be celebrated on Thursday and Friday, March 10 & 11.**

**DEDICATIONS: In memory of Yosef ben Esther**

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## Editors Notes

### Supporting a Communal Voice

After returning from Sinai with the second set of tablets, Moses makes an appeal to collect funds and materials for the building of the Tabernacle, it's holy vessels and the priestly garments. The last five portions of the book of Shemot or Exodus are dedicated to this endeavor. This week's reading of Parshat Vayakhel coincides with Shabbat Shekalim. Additionally Vayakhel and next week's portion of Pikidei seem to be a replay of the portions we read a few weeks ago of Terumah, detailing the vessels and Tesaveh detailing the garments. Why the repetition and why in the Torah which is so careful with words are so many verses dedicated to this?

In building the mishkan, there were required donations and the voluntary ones. There is a discussion as to the purpose of the mandatory half shekel from every person. Some opinions state that this was for the communal offering brought twice daily. This was certainly true in years going forward. Others state that initially it was for the silver sockets which bound and supporter the beams forming the walls of the mishkan. I believe we can see proof of this in the material tally next week. There is a listing of an abundance of gold and copper collected voluntarily, but silver is noticeably absent. The reasoning must be that all the silver needed came from the half shekel.

This communal giving of silver shared equally by all was instrumental in forming the walls of the mishkan. Thus everyone shared in the protection and support of the Tabernacle. Some may have donated more and others less for the vessels and the garments, but when it comes to support and protection, we all need to share equally.

Furthermore I would like to suggest that a lesson of the repetition from the portions discussing design to those which detail fabrication is representative of the communal obligation to see communal works through to completion as planned. We must all be a part of something we all benefit from. It's easy to say, "leave it to others", and we are lucky that it seems there are so many incredible individuals in the community who do step up, but that doesn't leave us without some obligations. We are required to protect, defend, support and see things through.

The Mishkan is prototypical of our synagogues, our yeshivot and schools, our mikvaot, our charitable organizations and all our communal endeavors. Often it is the vision and commitment of one person who is joined by family and friends in planning and building. But unless the idea catches fire and is supported by the greater the community it is often doomed to failure.

It's been more than twenty years since I began assembling a weekly newsletter of thoughts on the perasha and writing my own opening article. Through these words, often very personal, I have entered your homes and become a part of your lives. There are countless anecdotes I could tell of when I or my children met people for the first time and those people really knew everything about us. And those of you who comment and write back have become a part of my life. Over the years copies of the newsletter and my articles have found their way into other newsletters, newspapers, blogs and web pages around the world. Walking into a far off synagogue and seeing the newsletter being distributed in some format certainly bolsters the commitment to writing and emailing each week.

Locally I was very appreciative when my weekly column was picked up by the NY Jewish Voice. Although I discussed syndication with a number of publications and many on the left and right have reprinted articles over the years, I have been very comfortable with the Jewish Voice founded in 2005 and serving New York, New Jersey and southern Florida..

We must keep in mind that many of the largest Jewish publications supported by the conservative and reform movements are so out of sync with

modern orthodoxy that we wonder how Jews can be writing this stuff. They speak and politicians hear them and think it's our voice while nothing could be further from the truth. On the other side we have publications of the ultra-orthodox that border on the comical in their censorship.

In the center we find the Jewish Voice published by David BenHooren. David is a member of the community and staunch defender of it. His voice is representative of our voice in its unique and supportive Zionist outlook not only regarding events in Israel, but everywhere Jews are affected throughout the world. David and his staff are dedicated to the people and nation of Israel while being very pro-American. The Jewish Voice offers a perspective not widely found in the mainstream media, while maintaining enviable standards of journalistic integrity. They do it every day under intense pressure. It's not easy.

Having a weekly publication focused on the news we need to be aware of is good. Having a weekly publication representative of our voice editorially and influencing politicians both locally and nationally is crucial and something we cannot lose. The power of the press has been known for generations and it's a power which David and his staff share with us. They lend a voice to our rabbis, to our leaders and to us. They allow us to be heard.

But they cannot do it alone. They don't ask for much. They do ask for some support and commitment to help them with this publication which benefits all of us. We always think others will do. And others do. But that doesn't mean our small part is neither needed nor important. We are needed and what we can do is important. Even if it's just a half shekel, a small coin, a word of support, a subscription or a donation, we must keep that which benefits all of us going. Support the paper and their work. Visit them at JewishVoiceNY.com and donate or subscribe.

The mishkan benefitted all of us. There were some who donated gold, some copper, some wool, some silk and some precious stones. But we all shared in the silver with our half coins and no matter how inconsequential a half coin might seem, it was those half shekels which formed the sockets which bound the walls and protected the mishkan. In the same way, a common and unified Voice defends and protects all of us; let us share in supporting it.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

## **Want to boycott Israel? Put your money where your mouth is, website says** By Alina Dain Sharon/JNS.org

When navigating to [www.bdsguide.com](http://www.bdsguide.com), I'm immediately confronted with a clenched fist on a red banner against a crisp white background, and the matter-of-fact wording that I'm viewing the site in the Safari browser on Mac OS X. As an Apple product, my computer has been provided to me under the direction of CEO Tim Cook, who has met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a trip to Israel for the inauguration of one of the company's offices in the Jewish state.

"Please uninstall Safari," the notice warns me.

I'm also told that Apple recently acquired an Israeli chip manufacturer, Anobit, and opened a third research and development center in Israel. So I should definitely "uninstall OSX."

Continuing to browse the website, I discover an extensive and evolving list of companies and individuals that support Israel. At a time when the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement is working hard to make the case for taking a stand against Israel, the research accumulated in this guide could seemingly serve the boycotters well.

But there's more to this than meets the eye.

"If you really want to hurt the Israeli government because of the policies you disagree with, I don't think that's a valid thing, but...you should probably go after the things that bring the most tax revenue to allow Israel to carry on its policies," says Avi, an information technology worker and staunch Zionist who launched the pro-Israel website in disguise with his co-founder, Daniel. Both Avi and Daniel have chosen not to reveal their last names due to concerns of being personally targeted by BDS activists.

BDSguide.com, Avi explains, provides "an ever-growing list—certainly not a complete list, but the most complete I've seen—of what you would actually have to boycott if you're going to boycott Israel. And it's a very, very long list."

Launched in January, this platform is hardly the first pro-Israel website on the block. But what makes it unique is two-fold. First, Avi cites the website's "innovative" facet of analyzing its own users.

"The fact that it tells you what in your computer is from Israel is definitely something that catches the eye," he says.

Second, the website employs the tools of satire and irony to reveal the hypocrisy of the BDS movement, offering a genuine challenge to those who legitimately want to boycott Israel—which, considering the breadth of Israel's innovation, is nearly an impossible feat.

"I challenge anybody to go for one month without using anything that's on that list. One month would be next to impossible. You wouldn't be able to use a cell phone because almost all 4G chips are developed and manufactured in Israel. You wouldn't be able to use a computer because both Intel and AMD do their computer development in Israel. Intel just invested another \$3 billion in Israel to expand there by 2030. Microsoft just celebrated 25 years there. High-tech accounts for at least 75 percent of Israel's industrial exports," Avi says.

Israel is also a beacon of medical innovations in areas such as MRI technology and cancer treatment. For instance, a U.S. cancer study hailed in February as potentially revolutionary for the treatment of leukemia is based on Israeli research (by Prof. Zelig Eshhar from Weizmann Institute of Science) showing that T-cells can be modified genetically to destroy leukemia tumor cells. Additionally, notes Avi, Israel's Teva Pharmaceuticals "is one of the largest, generic drug manufacturers in the world. If you've taken a generic drug, chances are it comes from Teva."

What spurred Avi—along with Daniel, a Web designer and developer—to launch BDSguide.com was the Cornell University chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine's uploading of a website built on the Israeli website-building platform Wix, with the logo of the platform clearly visible at the bottom of the page and the word "wix" appearing as part of the website's URL.

"We just found that kind of funny, so Daniel got in touch with me and said we should do something to point out this hypocrisy of them using Israeli technology to call for a boycott of Israel. There wasn't one definitive website that had everything, so we took on that challenge and decided to do it," Avi says.

In addition to the aforementioned features, the website hosts a section for BDS-related news. A recent post is dedicated to the mid-February controversy surrounding the cancellation of a conference dedicated to South Africa's water crisis because Israel's ambassador to South Africa, Arthur

Lenk, was participating. BDS South Africa praised both the event's cancellation and the "principled" withdrawal of the University of Pretoria's Prof. Lorenzo Fioramonti, saying, "Water and water management is far too important for cheap Israeli gimmicks to advance its own oppressive agenda."

Israel, however, is a leading source of innovation in water irrigation and desalination technology, a feat that has recently allowed the country to help the state of California combat drought. An Israeli company, IDE Technologies, designed a desalination plant that will provide Californians with 50 million gallons of drinking water daily. The post on BDSguide.com, therefore, points out that those who really lost out due to the conference's cancellation were South African farmers.

The website also includes an interactive quiz intended to show the ubiquity of Israel's innovation across many fields; other sections highlight companies working or investing in Israel, or offer thoughts on the BDS movement in general. For example, a recent blog post focuses on BDS movement co-founder Omar Barghouti, noting that while he is calling for an academic boycott of Israel, the man himself is studying at Tel Aviv University.

While Avi performs the website's research, data collection, interaction, and social media engagement, Daniel handles the technical and artistic side of the platform. Born and raised in New York to Israeli parents, Daniel says the website has gotten largely positive feedback from the pro-Israel community.

"But possibly more important," he tells JNS.org, "is the attention that we've gotten from the BDS community, which is really our most unique angle here. If we were to make this site clearly pro-Israel, then we would be preaching to the choir and talking to only people who agree with our standpoint. [Since] it's initially a little ambiguous as to what our position is, [this] allows pro-BDS people to step in and view our material."

In fact, BDS activists have been sharing the website amongst themselves, first introducing it as a legitimate BDS website, and then correcting themselves when they've realized the website's true purpose.

"Most often when we engage in a conversation with them and we expose their hypocrisy...usually they have nothing to say in return" other than insults, Daniel says.

Some members of the pro-Israel community have raised the concern that the website may give the BDS community additional fodder that can be used to expand the boycott of the Jewish state—an idea the founders dismiss.

“We’re coming out with a comic series that actually depicts what it would be like for someone to actually boycott Israel. It essentially depicts a caveman who is trying any method he has left to spread the message of BDS...hoping that someone is going to hear him because he can’t use his Apple computer, his phone, Facebook, and so on. So we’re really not worried about this supporting BDS movements in any way,” Daniel says.

At the end of the day, “people don’t like a hypocrite,” adds Avi.

The founders’ long-term goal is to continue finding new and creative ways to reach people and spread this message. In addition to the upcoming comic strip, they’re planning an animated video. One specific way they hope to see their website used is in the realm of pro-Israel college campus activism. The campus arena “is where [BDS] is felt the most,” and students need to be armed “with the tools to defend Israel, and not just to defend Israel but to go on the offensive,” Avi says.

In some of the latest BDS-driven anti-Semitic incidents on campus, 10 students interrupted a faculty council meeting at Brooklyn College by calling for “Zionists off campus,” and swastikas were discovered on desks and walls at the College of Staten Island.

While some BDS tactics are “despicable and shouldn’t be used by anyone,” it’s important to recognize that “some of them we can actually learn from,” Avi says.

BDS activists, he says, “are very theatrical about how they do things, and people respond to that...and we would like to get involved and help pro-Israel campus activism spread that message a lot more effectively.”

Aviva Slomich, international campus director for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), says BDSguide.com’s Israel-positive information can serve as a useful tool for pro-Israel students.

“When BDS petitions arise, the BDS Guide can be used by pro-Israel activists as an educational resource to share with the students and faculty on their respective campuses. It’s good to see that

efforts are being made to expose the hypocrisy of the BDS movement and its racist agenda,” she tells JNS.org.

While Avi and Daniel don’t believe their website can change the minds of committed BDS activists, they hope to reach those people who are on the fence on Israel.

Ultimately, says Avi, the goal is to show that “if you’re going to boycott dates and hummus, you’re not really making a dent.”

### Summary of the Perasha

#### **Betzalel makes the mishkan and kelim**

- 1- Moshe instructs Benei Israel about the Shabbat. Moshe instructs Benei Israel to build the mishkan and its kelim
- 2- Benei Israel donates materials for the mishkan
- 3- Bezalel, Aholiab and the hachmey lev begin making the mishkan and kelim
- 4- The yeriots are made
- 5- The kerashim, parochet, masach of the ohel moed, aron, kaporet, and shulchan are made
- 6- The menorah, golden mizbeyach, oil and incense are made
- 7- The copper mizbeyach, kiyor & kano, courtyard and masach for the courtyard are made

### FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

**“For six days work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem.” (Shemot 35:2)**

Our perashah begins with Moshe Rabenu gathering the people to tell them about the project of building the Mishkan. However, before he does that, he tells them about the laws of Shabbat. Rashi explains that Moshe told them first the prohibition of working on Shabbat before the commandment of the construction of the Mishkan to teach that the work on the Mishkan does not override the Shabbat.

There is a similar verse in last week’s perashah, and the words “Shabbat shabbaton” appear there as well (31:15). Rashi there explains it to mean “a Sabbath of cessation,” which is a “rest of relaxation, not a casual rest.” Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch explains this Rashi in the following manner: Shabbat is not a day of rest like a day off for workers, for they rest from their work temporarily but the whole time they are still immersed in their work. But Shabbat is different. It’s a complete rest that adds holiness to the person, and that holiness has an impact on the rest of the week. We are different people because of Shabbat.

Let's bring a proof to this from an unlikely source, an article in a high-tech magazine, written by Roger Cheng, titled "Untangling your Digital Life (While Embracing It)." He speaks about celebrities who have begun to take a break from their smartphones.

"When Tiffany Shlain's father died five years ago, it was a wake-up call. She needed to realize she'd gotten sucked in by tech and wasn't spending enough time with family. She experimented with a "technology Shabbat," having her husband and kids unplug their devices between Friday evening and Saturday night.

"They continue this practice to this day. 'It's had a profound effect on my happiness,' says Shlain, founder of the Webby Awards and star of the AOL Online Show. 'The future starts here.'

"What she realized, and what everyone realizes once they disconnect, is that the world doesn't stop when you log off. People learned to adjust to her Shabbat."

Baruch Hashem, we learned this long ago.  
Rabbi Reuven Semah

**When Moshe Rabenu called upon everyone to donate to the Mishkan**, the women stepped forward and offered their copper mirrors which they used to preen themselves. Moshe was understandingly reluctant to accept such a type of donation, whereupon Hashem told him to accept them because they are very beloved in His Eyes (Hashem's). These mirrors were used to make the women pretty in the eyes of their husbands when they were all downtrodden in the mud pits of Egypt, and through these mirrors, the Jewish people multiplied to become the nation of Hashem.

Interestingly, these copper ornaments were used to make the Kiyor, the washbasin which the Kohanim used to wash themselves before the Holy Service. Also, the water which was used to make a suspected adulterer's drink came from this basin. The lesson to be learned is that since these mirrors promoted love and loyalty between husband and wife, the waters found in this Kiyor would also guarantee that if a woman is free of sin, she would be found innocent and return to her husband. When someone does an act of love and devotion, anything which comes from that act will have those same characteristics. We should realize that nothing is forgotten by Hashem, and if someone does a kindness or a good deed with true feelings, this will only bring goodness and blessing to himself and others. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

## ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

"And the bringing of the materials was enough for all the work that was to be done, and more than enough." (Shemot 36:7)

Upon reading this pasuk, one is confronted with an apparent contradiction. Initially we are told that the bringing of the materials was "enough," implying that the people brought whatever was necessary to build the Tabernacle, but not more than that. Then, immediately the pasuk concludes with "and more than enough." How could it have been both just enough and more than enough? The Torah is informing us of the unbounded love that Hashem has for the Jews. Due to the fact that they brought even more than was necessary, Hashem concerned himself with the honor due each individual Jew who extended himself and contributed toward the Tabernacle. Hashem saw to it that miraculously every contribution was included in the Tabernacle's construction. Consequently, the meaning of the pasuk is, that despite the surplus, Hashem insured that the Tabernacle encompasses all that the people had brought. Miraculously, the receptacle was able to receive more than it could actually contain.

There are two factors which contributed to the people's meriting such a miracle. First, their contribution was purely for the sake of Heaven, free of any personal motives and interests. Second, they performed this misvah with an amazing eagerness. As the Ohr Hahayim comments, they all took leave of Moshe, with alacrity to bring the material as one. This included every Jew, each one careful not to selfishly deter another fellow so that he could bring a given item in its place. One must always be aware that every act which is performed purely for the sake of Heaven is never forgotten Above. It is recognized and recorded in Heaven, and its rewards are forthcoming and everlasting. (Peninim on the Torah)

## RELAX

Rabbi Abraham Twerski, M.D. wrote, "I came to the conclusion that what most people consider relaxation is actually diversion. They may read a book, listen to music, do handiwork, play golf, or watch a ballgame. These and similar pastimes allow them to focus their attention on something other than themselves.

"In reality, pure relaxation consists of closing your eyes, reclining (but not sleeping), and not focusing your attention on anything. One is then left in intimate contact with oneself."

Most people have trouble spending time in the company of individuals with whom they feel uncomfortable. Some can't take more than a few minutes in the boss's office. Others cannot sit still in the presence of a Rabbi. For some it is even a problem to relax in the presence of certain family

members, such as spouse or parents. Experts on the human psyche say that this uneasiness is caused by a lack of confidence, by low self-esteem. These tense victims of anxiety fear that the other person might detect weakness, or even incompetence, in some aspect of their personality or their ability to perform.

The worst problem is when people can't bear to spend time with themselves. The solution to their "loneliness," they feel, is to keep on running, to keep busy with an assortment of diversions that Madison Avenue and the world of business have provided.

If you are hit with an attack of "ants in your pants," take a deep breath, find a quiet corner, sit back, close your eyes, and relax. Think of one or two things you do well. Consider that although you are not perfect, neither is anyone else. Start to build a positive self-image on the foundation of your strengths. If you learn to hit your emotional brakes, you will get to spend some time in very good company – your own! (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
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**[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)**  
**They Left From Moshe's Presence**

Parashat Vayakhel begins by telling of the assembly that Moshe Rabbenu held after the incident of the golden calf. At this assembly, Moshe relayed God's command to observe Shabbat, and the command to build the Mishkan. The Torah writes that when Moshe finished speaking, "Va'yes'u Kol Adat Beneh Yisrael Mi'lifneh Moshe" ("The entire congregation of Beneh Yisrael left from Moshe's presence"– 35:20).

A number of Rabbis addressed the question of why the Torah found it necessary to emphasize that the people left "Mi'lifneh Moshe"– from Moshe's presence. Quite obviously, they had been in front of Moshe hearing him speak. The Torah could have simply informed us that they left to bring materials for the Mishkan. Curiously, though, the Torah made a point of stressing the fact that they left from Moshe's presence.

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian (England-Israel, 1876-1970) explained that even after the people took leave of Moshe, it was evident that they had been in Moshe's presence. Often, the way a person walks is an indication of where he had just been. A person who staggers as he walks through the street is very likely coming from a bar. Somebody coming from a gym might walk with a certain vigor and gusto. The Torah emphasizes that Beneh Yisrael left "Mi'lifneh Moshe" to express the fact that their conduct after leaving

Moshe reflected that they had just been in Moshe's presence. The experience of being near Moshe and listening to his teachings had an impact upon them. The people did not just leave and resume their ordinary routine. They left inspired and uplifted, profoundly impacted by the experience of being in Moshe's presence.

When we leave the synagogue or a Torah class, we cannot be the exact same people we had been beforehand. The experience must impact the way we behave in all areas of life. Our conduct when we are not in the synagogue or learning Torah must reflect the fact that we had spent time praying and studying. It is our responsibility to ensure that when people see us leaving the synagogue, they admire our conduct, and realize that involvement in Judaism has a meaningful, positive effect upon a person's character. When we take leave of the synagogue or Bet Midrash, it must be "Mi'lifneh Moshe," evident that we were influenced and uplifted by the experience.

Torah life is not only about our conduct in the synagogue – it is about our conduct everywhere, and in every aspect of our lives.

The way we act in any situation must be a reflection of the Torah we study and Misvot we perform. It cannot be "business as usual" after we leave the synagogue. The experience must change us, inspire us, and impact upon who we are and what we do in every area of life.

**VICTOR BIBI**  
**SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein**  
**TOO MUCH, TOO FAST**

Profligate behavior has always been a byproduct of great personal wealth, especially great wealth acquired relatively quickly. One of the great psychological rules of a great supply of money is that it searches for an outlet. Money burns a hole in one's pocket. And thus many times, spending becomes foolish, ostentatious, unnecessary and sometimes even self-destructive.

And in our instant communication society where people feel impelled to tell everything about anything to everybody and to do so instantaneously, any act of such over the top spending becomes the story of the day.

A wealthy Jewish businessman in the United States spent a large amount of money to have a Jewish rapper (an oxymoron, if there ever was one) to perform at the bat mitzvah celebration for his daughter and her twelve-year old friends. For some reason, this important piece of news went viral on social media, with names and amounts of money all publicized to the iPhones amongst us.

This breathless piece of news was even broadcast nationally on a leading American radio network that I unfortunately was listening to. The rich cannot expect any rights of privacy in today's world and therefore apparently extreme and foolish behavior will always be held up to public scrutiny and even ridicule. One would think that this reality would be taken into account before such a course of behavior is embarked upon. But as Kung Solomon pointed out long ago, wealth and good common sense do not necessarily accompany each other in one's life.

There are many courses being offered as how to manage one's wealth. These courses are meant to instruct the newly wealthy – sports stars, newly discovered entertainment and media personalities, start-up computer geeks, lottery winners, etc. – how to conserve and invest their new found wealth. But to the best of my knowledge, there is no course to help one deal psychologically, emotionally and even spiritually with sudden wealth.

Everyone needs an angel whispering in his or her ear: "Don't act impulsively and foolishly, don't hold yourself up to public scrutiny and shame!" That personal angel should, in the best circumstances, be one's spouse and family. But in the absence of such an intimate angel, one should certainly engage a very good friend to navigate the rapids of sudden wealth.

Just as people engage financial advisers to help them sort through their income and investments, there is also a necessity for a wealth adviser to help them use them use their wealth wisely, with good sense and probity. This is especially necessary in a Jewish community exposed to the anti-Semitic mindset of associating Jews with money and imagined wanton luxuries.

All of the anti-Semitic cartoons of the last century and present-day society as well, associate Jews with being porcine, greedy, and purely money and spending oriented in the extreme. So a family event can unwittingly become a source of unwanted shame, notoriety....even bordering on desecration. No one does these things purposely. But the wise person, in the view of the Talmud, sees the

consequences of one's actions and behavior before acting on one's wishes.

This is especially true when it comes to dealing with wealth, which often confounds the wisdom of otherwise smart people. Societal life is strewn with the debris of the errors in judgment and behavior of the rich and famous.

I have often quoted the dictum of the rabbis of the Talmud that Jews do much better handling circumstances of poverty than they do with extreme prosperity. We pray regularly for prosperity in our individual and national lives. Oftentimes we are able to live more easily with what we do not have than with what we do have. We are bewitched by our own successes, especially with our financial successes. We ascribe our successes to ourselves and our failures to others, unfortunate circumstances or the inscrutable whims of Heaven.

Yet, on true and honest analysis, so many of our ills and troubles, especially with money and wealth, are really self-inflicted. A little common sense can go a long way in preventing embarrassment and insult. No one except the rapper benefited from the Bat Mitzvah incident and its ramifications. One cannot help but be perplexed as to how a lavish party and a rapper performance are true markers of a young Jewish girl reaching the age of Torah commandments.

Oh, how rare is common sense, restraint and traditional respect to Jewish institutions! Extreme prosperity is destroying our souls and our families. We should remind ourselves that the prayer for good sense precedes the prayer for wealth and prosperity. There is good reason for that.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Social Animal**

At the beginning of Vayakhel Moses performs a tikkun, a mending of the past, namely the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah signals this by using essentially the same word at the beginning of both episodes. It eventually became a key word in Jewish spirituality: k-h-l, "to gather, assemble, congregate." From it we get the words kahal and kehillah, meaning "community". Far from being merely an ancient concern, it remains at the heart of our humanity. As we will see, recent scientific research confirms the extraordinary power of communities and social networks to shape our lives.

First, the biblical story. The episode of the Golden Calf began with these words: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the

mountain, they gathered themselves [vayikahel] around Aaron ..." (Ex. 32:1). At the beginning of this week's parsha, having won God's forgiveness and brought down a second set of tablets, Moses began the work of rededicating the people: "Moses assembled [vayakhel] the entire Israelite congregation ..." (Ex. 35:1). They had sinned as a community. Now they were about to be reconstituted as a community. Jewish spirituality is first and foremost a communal spirituality.

Note too exactly what Moses does in this week's parsha. He directs their attention to the two great centres of community in Judaism, one in space, the other in time. The one in time is Shabbat. The one in space was the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, that led eventually to the Temple and later to the synagogue. These are where kehillah lives most powerfully: on Shabbat when we lay aside our private devices and desires and come together as a community, and the synagogue, where community has its home.

Judaism attaches immense significance to the individual. Every life is like a universe. Each one of us, though we are all in God's image, is different, therefore unique and irreplaceable. Yet the first time the words "not good" appear in the Torah are in the verse, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Much of Judaism is about the shape and structure of our togetherness. It values the individual but does not endorse individualism.

Ours is a religion of community. Our holiest prayers can only be said in the presence of a minyan, the minimum definition of a community. When we pray, we do so as a community. Martin Buber spoke of I-and-Thou, but Judaism is really a matter of We-and-Thou. Hence, to atone for the sin the Israelites committed as a community, Moses sought to consecrate community in time and place.

This has become one of the fundamental differences between tradition and the contemporary culture of the West. We can trace this in the titles of three landmark books about American society. In 1950, David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney published an insightful book about the changing character of Americans, called *The Lonely Crowd*. In 2000 Robert Putnam of Harvard published *Bowling Alone*, an account of how more Americans than ever were going ten-pin bowling but fewer were joining bowling clubs and leagues. In 2011, Sherry Turkle of MIT published a book on the impact of smartphones and social networking software called *Alone Together*.

Listen to those titles. They are each about the

advancing tide of loneliness, successive stages in the long, extended breakdown of community in modern life. Robert Bellah put it eloquently when he wrote that "social ecology is damaged not only by war, genocide and political repression. It is also damaged by the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another, leaving them frightened and alone." [1]

That is why the two themes of Vayakhel – Shabbat and the Mishkan, today the synagogue – remain powerfully contemporary. They are antidotes to the attenuation of community. They help restore "the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another." They reconnect us to community.

Consider Shabbat. Michael Walzer, the Princeton political philosopher, draws attention to the difference between holidays and holy days (or as he puts it, between vacations and Shabbat). [2] The idea of a vacation as a private holiday is relatively recent. Walzer dates it to the 1870s. Its essence is its individualist (or familial) character. "Everyone plans his own vacation, goes where he wants to go, does what he wants to do." Shabbat, by contrast, is essentially collective: "you, your son and daughter, your male and female servant, your ox, your donkey, your other animals, and the stranger in your gates." It is public, shared, the property of us all. A vacation is a commodity. We buy it. Shabbat is not something we buy. It is available to each on the same terms: "enjoined for everyone, enjoyed by everyone." We take vacations as individuals or families. We celebrate Shabbat as a community.

Something similar is true about the synagogue – the Jewish institution, unique in its day, that was eventually adopted by Christianity and Islam in the form of the church and mosque. We noted above Robert Putnam's argument in *Bowling Alone*, that Americans were becoming more individualistic. There was a loss, he said, of "social capital," that is, the ties that bind us together in shared responsibility for the common good.

A decade later, Putnam revised his thesis. [3] Social capital, he said, still exists, and you can find it in churches and synagogues. Regular attendees at a place of worship were – so his research showed – more likely than others to give money to charity, engage in voluntary work, donate blood, spend time with someone who is depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, help find someone a job, and many other measures of civic, moral and philanthropic activism. They are, quite simply, more public spirited than others. Regular attendance at a house of worship is the most accurate predictor of altruism, more so than



any other factor, including gender, education, income, race, region, marital status, ideology and age.

Most fascinating of his findings is that the key factor is being part of a religious community. What turned out not to be relevant is what you believe. The research findings suggest that an atheist who goes regularly to a house of worship (perhaps to accompany a spouse or a child) is more likely to volunteer in a soup kitchen than a fervent believer who prays alone. The key factor again is community.

This may well be one of the most important functions of religion in a secular age, namely, keeping community alive. Most of us need community. We are social animals. Evolutionary biologists have suggested recently that the huge increase in brain size represented by Homo sapiens was specifically to allow us to form more extended social networks. It is the human capacity to co-operate in large teams – rather than the power of reason – that marks us off from other animals. As the Torah says, it is not good to be alone.

Recent research has shown something else as well. Who you associate with has a powerful impact on what you do and become. In 2009 Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler did statistical analysis of a group of 5,124 subjects and their 53,228 ties to friends family and work colleagues. They found that if a friend takes up smoking, it makes it significantly more likely (by 36 per cent) that you will. The same applies to drinking, slenderness, obesity, and many other behavioural patterns.[4] We become like the people we are close to.

A study of students at Dartmouth College in the year 2000 found that if you share a room with someone with good study habits, it will probably raise your own performance. A 2006 Princeton study showed that if your sibling has a child, it makes it 15 per cent more likely that you will within the next two years. There is such a thing as “social contagion”. We are profoundly influenced by our friends – as indeed Maimonides states in his law code, the Mishneh Torah (Laws of Character Traits, 6:1).

Which brings us back to Moses and Vayakhel. By placing community at the heart of the religious life and by giving it a home in space and time – the synagogue and Shabbat – Moses was showing the power of community for good, as the episode of the Golden Calf had shown its power for bad. Jewish spirituality is for the most part profoundly communal. Hence my definition of Jewish faith: the redemption of our solitude.

[1] Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1985, 284.

[2] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1983, 190-196.

[3] Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

[4] Nicholas Christakis and James H. Fowler, *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. New York: Little, Brown, 2009.

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

**“Six days you may do work, and on the Seventh Day shall be for you a holiness of Shabbat of Shabbathon to Hashem” (35:2)**

The Gemara says: “Pesiah gasa-Stepping hastily, takes away 1/500 of a man’s eyesight” (Berachot 43B).

When you are anxious and worried, running here and there, your eyesight is affected. Eye specialists will tell you that excitement often affects the eyes. David Hamelech said “Ashesha mika’as eini” ((Tehillim 6:8). “My eyes became worn out from ka’as, anger.” So be careful of ka’as; it could ruin your eyes. The hasty footstep of pesiah gasa, the anxiety that plagues us all week, takes away 1/500 of man’s eyesight.

Mai takanato? What is the remedy?, the Gemara asks, that will restore his eyesight? Drink from the Kiddush he makes Friday night. How does this happen? You were so tired and so worried, but you’ve finally made it. Now you are standing dressed in bigdei Shabbat, with the wine in your hand, and it is all behind you. You are declaring that it was all a waste of worries, a waste of anxiety.

“Vayechulu Hashamayim Veha’aretz”, everything was done by Hashem until now, and He is still in charge, conducting our affairs. Shabbat is a great consolation. Hashem says, “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of everything. You keep on doing what you’re supposed to be doing, and leave everything to Me. I’ll worry for you.” That is what Shabbat tells us, and that is the way to restore your eyesight.

This is the lesson of the Mann:

Don’t be in anxiety. Everything is under control  
You will succeed. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge

Whatever happens is for the best

And the Best is what Hashem considers the Best.

Quoted from “Rabbi Avigdor Miller Speaks” Artscroll