



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Shemot

Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei

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Back to the Future

By Jordan Bryk

Twenty years ago, I was a student at *Yeshivat Har Etzion* in *Gush Etzion*, Israel. *Rav Moshe Taragin*, who visited YIS this past Shavuot, delivered a weekly *shiur* on the *parsha*, which I would record on a handheld cassette player. Thankfully I labeled the tapes carefully and saved them in a cardboard box. When we moved into our new home in Scarsdale, I rediscovered this box which by then had seasoned into a genuine time capsule. In recent months, I bought a new tape player on Amazon and started listening, enjoying the odd reactions on Metro North! I hope to share some of these rediscovered gems in future issues of The Collective Conversation. The following *dvar Torah* is adapted from a February 24, 2003 recording on *Parsha Vayakhel*, which, serendipitously, was about time travel (in the existential sense): man's capacity for *teshuvah*.

Parashiot Vayakhel and *Pekudei* are a palindrome of *Parashiot Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*. Both sides, separated in the middle by the sin of the Golden Calf in *Parshat Ki Tisa*, describe the building of the *Mishkan* in painstaking detail: how each instrument should be fashioned, the dimensions of the building and structures, the upholstery, the furniture, the precise clothing of the *Kohen Gadol*, etc. Why does the Torah dedicate so much time to this minutiae, not just once but twice?

To answer this question, *Rav Taragin* shared an emotionally powerful parable originally told by *Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l*, the former *Rosh Yeshiva*, to illustrate a glaring message implicit in the building of the *Mishkan*:

After an intense courtship, a young couple finally decides to get engaged. Plans for the wedding kick into high gear, and each decision is a labor of love: the venue, the flowers, the clothing, the dress, etc. The couple then decides to build a house. They spend days walking through the new structure planning not just the furniture and accessories but the future of their life and love together. Banal decisions become acts of excitement and commitment.

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What would happen if there were a betrayal right at that moment?

Terumah and *Teztaveh* represent the first time God and *Bnei Yisrael* build their house together, and *Har Sinai* is their *chuppah*. The romantic story, however, ends in betrayal with the sin of the Golden Calf. Jewish history would have ended right there, if not for the heroic pleading of *Moshe* on the people's behalf. The striking outcome is that God sends the original plans back to *Moshe* to build the *Mishkan* in *Vayakhel-Pekudei*, and the Torah goes out of its way to retrace all of the details once again. Symbolically, *Bnei Yisrael* returns to the exact same state as before the fall.

At a human level, when someone wrongs another, reconciliation can be reached and forgiveness can be granted. However, it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to go back to the original state of where things once were. The wounds often still run deep and the pain may still be acutely felt.

In contrast, *Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei* is a stylistic attempt of the Torah to demonstrate that, when it comes to man's relationship with God and spiritual development, one can never permanently impair one's potential. The Jewish soul is equipped with the capacity of not just *chadeish yameinu* – renewing our days – but *chadeish yameinu kekedem* – renewing our days like it was before.

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How does *Moshe* instruct *Bnei Yisrael* to kick off their comeback? In essence, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes, by keeping *Shabbat* and building community:

At the very beginning of *Vayakhel*, *Moshe* first reminds them of their obligation to honor the *Shabbat* and then invites all those moved by an uplifted heart and a spirit of volunteerism to contribute to the *Mishkan*, the predecessor to the Temple and ultimately the modern-day synagogue.

As we celebrate Prospective Members *Shabbat*, may we all be inspired by the superpowers of *Shabbat* and *kehilah* in renewing and rejuvenating the Jewish soul – *kekedem*!

Jordan and Caroline moved into town from the Upper East Side in August 2021. They are grateful to have found such a wonderful home at the Young Israel of Scarsdale along with their three children, Margaux (WDS 2nd grade), James (WDS kindergarten) and Nicky (Chabad 2s).

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Sign-up [HERE](#) or contact Jordan Bryk jordan.bryk@gmail.com or Jeff Berger jsberger@gmail.com



The Collective Conversation is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

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