

In our *Parashah*, the *Mishkan* / Tabernacle is finally completed. Commentaries note that our *Parashah* says 18 times that the *Mishkan* and its implements were made exactly "as *Hashem* had commanded Moshe." Also, *Rashi z"l* notes that the opening verse of our *Parashah* alludes to the eventual destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* / the First and Second Temples, which *Hashem* took as a "*Mashkon*" / pledge for the sins of *Yisrael*. These two facts can lead us to a deeper understanding of the significance of the *Mishkan* and *Bet Hamikdash*, based on a thought from R' Avraham Mordechai Alter *shlita* (Yerushalayim; grandson of the previous *Gerrer Rebbe*), who writes:

The *Gemara* (*Gittin* 56b) relates that in the period leading up to the destruction of the Second Temple there was a disagreement between the leading sage of the generation, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai (RYBZ), and the *Biryonim* / a fierce militia defending Yerushalayim. The *Biryonim* wanted to defend the *Bet Hamikdash* at all costs, even if it meant death for everyone in Yerushalayim, but RYBZ smuggled himself out of Yerushalayim and negotiated with the Roman Emperor Vespasian to save the *Sanhedrin* and its scholars. R' Alter explains that the *Biryonim* saw the *Bet Hamikdash* as something with inherent value. RYBZ, on the other hand, understood that the *Bet Hamikdash* has value only if the *Shechinah* rests there, which, in turn, depends on our obeying *Hashem*. Without that, the *Bet Hamikdash* has no holiness.

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Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 113b) teaches: "Your speech on *Shabbat* should not be like your speech on a weekday." Understood most simply, the *Gemara* is teaching, as *Rashi z"l* writes, that one should not speak about business matters or about his accounts on *Shabbat*.

R' Pinchas Halevi Ish Horowitz *z"l* (1731-1805; rabbi of Frankfurt, Germany; author of widely used commentaries on Tractates *Ketubot* and *Kiddushin*) explains: *Hashem* created the world using "speech," as we read (*Tehilim* 33:6), "By the word of *Hashem* the heavens were made . . ." On *Shabbat*, *Hashem* refrained from speaking in this creative way, so we should as well. (Nevertheless, R' Horowitz notes, this prohibition does not have the status of a Biblical commandment.)

R' Horowitz continues: But, if that were all that the *Gemara* means, it could say simply, "Do not speak about mundane matters on *Shabbat*." Rather, the *Gemara* is teaching also that everything a person says on *Shabbat* should be with greater holiness than he says the same thing on a weekday. For example, the first three *Berachot* of *Shemoneh Esrei* are exactly the same on *Shabbat* as on a weekday. But, "Your speech on *Shabbat* should not be like your speech on a weekday." Therefore, purify your thoughts to a greater degree on *Shabbat* so that you will recite these very same blessings differently than you do all week long. Likewise, when you study Torah on *Shabbat*, do it with greater holiness than how you study on a weekday. This, writes R' Horowitz, is the meaning of the verse (*Tehilim* 149:1), "Sing to *Hashem* a new song; His praise is in the congregation of the devout." The song--*i.e.*, the Torah--is the same song, but it is a "new song" when it is sung in a different environment--here, the "congregation of the devout," and likewise, on *Shabbat*.

(*Panim Yafot: Shmot* 20:10)

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The Month of Adar

“In the first month, which is the month of Nissan, in the twelfth year of King Achashverosh, a *Pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month of *Adar*.” (Esther 3:7)

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 13b) relates: When the lot fell on *Adar*, Haman was very happy, and he said, “The lot fell for me on the month when Moshe died.” But he (Haman) did not know that on the seventh of *Adar* Moshe died and on the seventh of *Adar* he was born. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

What is the connection between the death of Moshe, or his birth, and the *Purim* miracle? R’ Yehuda Loewe *z”l* (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains: Do not think that there was no significance to this lot; after all, you might say, its prediction that the Jewish People would be destroyed in *Adar* did not come true. The *Megillah* tells us that the lot was cast in the very important month of *Nissan* to emphasize its significance. How so? *Maharal* explains: In fact, on our own, the Jewish People are susceptible to having an end, and *Adar*, the end of the months, is a fitting time for that to occur (G-d forbid). (The Torah calls *Nissan* the first month and, as our verse says, *Adar* is the twelfth month.) What then ensures the eternity of the Jewish People? Only our connection to *Hashem*. Our very name, *Yisrael*, ends with a Name of G-d (*Kel*), thus ensuring that we will not have a “different end.”

Maharal continues: When Haman had lots cast, he was trying to determine which month is an auspicious time to bring about the Jewish People’s end. He was pleased when the lot settled on the month when Moshe died, for Moshe, the Giver of the Torah and teacher of the Jewish People, represents the essence the *Tzurah* / most complete manifestation of our People. If Moshe could meet his end in *Adar*, then so too could the Jewish People, Haman reasoned. Moreover, just as the Exodus occurred in the first month, so the end of the Jewish People would be in the last month, he thought.

But Haman was wrong, for he did not realize that Moshe also was born in *Adar*. Dying on his own birthday was an indication that Moshe Rabbeinu had reached completion, just as a circle is completed by ending where it began. Moreover, the 12th month alludes to Moshe’s 120 years, whose *Mispar Kattan* (a type of *Gematria* in which the zeros are dropped from the tens and hundreds places) equals 12. The *Mispar Kattan* of Moshe’s name (*Mem* = 4, *Shin* = 3, *Heh* = 5) also equals 12, showing that Moshe’s life-span was just right for him. As such, his death could not be a bad omen.

(*Ohr Chadash*)

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In this light, continues R’ Alter, we can understand the following *Gemara* (*Yoma* 52b): When the *Kohen Gadol* entered the *Kodesh Ha’kadashim* on *Yom Kippur*, he prayed only a brief prayer in order not to worry the Jews who were waiting outside for his safe return. (If the *Kohen Gadol* was unworthy, he would not return alive.) Once, a *Kohen Gadol* prayed a longer prayer, and his fellow *Kohanim* admonished him. He retorted, “Does it bother you that I prayed for you and for the Temple, that it should not be destroyed?” They responded, “Even so, do not do that, for our Sages said not to pray a long prayer lest it cause people to worry.” (Until here from the *Gemara*) R’ Alter explains: If *Halachah* says not to pray a long prayer, then even a prayer in the seemingly holiest place in the world has no more value than a prayer uttered in a mundane place. This is what the Torah means when it says (*Vayikra* 10:1) that Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, “brought before *Hashem* an alien fire that He had not commanded them [to bring].” Nadav and Avihu complied in all respects with the laws of bringing *Ketoret* / incense, except for one detail--*Hashem* had not given that *Mitzvah* to them. That made their act worthless and not a *Mitzvah* at all; indeed, they died because of it.

R’ Alter continues: Avraham Avinu was the paradigm of *Chessed* / kindness. Every idea about *Chessed* that has ever been written in any Torah commentary, Avraham fulfilled, R’ Alter writes. How, then, could Avraham obey *Hashem*’s command to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice--the opposite of *Chessed*? R’ Alter answers: Avraham understood that *Chessed* has no independent value; it is fulfilling the word of *Hashem* that has value. When it is His will that we perform *Chessed*, then that is what we must do. And, when it is His will that we act with *Gevurah* / strength, as at the *Akeidah*, then that *Middah* / trait takes precedence. Notably, the very location where the *Akeidah* took place, where Avraham proved his complete subjugation to G-d’s will, is where the *Bet Hamikdash* was built. This fact reflects the idea expressed above: the location of the *Bet Hamikdash* is not inherently holy; rather, it derives its holiness from our adherence to *Hashem*’s commandments.

[Similarly, the *Mishkan*--and later, the *Bet Hamikdash*--was holy only because it was built exactly as *Hashem* had commanded. This is why the *Mishkan* atoned for the Golden Calf, which the commentaries say was well intentioned, but contrary to the will of *Hashem*. And, our *Parashah* hints, the *Bet Hamikdash* was destined to be destroyed when we no longer lived up to the standard taught in our *Parashah*, because only adherence to *Hashem*’s commandments gives the Temple its holiness.]

(*Emet Ve’da’at: Ma’amar “Ve’shachanti B’toch Bnei Yisrael”*)