



GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT VAYAKHEL - PEKUDEI

The Perfect Blend

In the beginning of Parshat Vayakhel, Moshe Rabbeinu gathers the entire Jewish people and repeats the command to build a Mishkan. The people respond with immense enthusiasm. They bring gold, silver, copper, all sorts of fabrics, wood, oil, and precious stones – so much so that Moshe begs them to stop, to “chill out,” so to say, on the generosity of their donations. It may be the first fundraiser that asked people to stop donating.

But in the second parsha of this week, Parshat Pekudei, the Torah pauses and accounts for all the donations that were given toward the Mishkan, showing how much gold, silver, and copper were donated and how much was used. The Torah recounts every detail.

Why would the Torah spend so much time on the accounting aspect of the Mishkan?

The Midrash Tanchuma explains that Moshe gave a full accounting to ward away any suspicion that any material was not being used appropriately. Even though Moshe was the most trustworthy servant of Hashem, he still presented the entirety of the accounting, showing the public without doubt how their contributions were handled.

This teaches the famous yet simple lesson in leadership and responsibility: even when someone is doing the right thing, a good leader shows that he is accountable and transparent so that trust can flourish. However, there is an even more spiritual message that can be learned from this.

The two parshiyot express a contrast in their messages. In Vayakhel we see inspiration and how passionate the people were to contribute to Hashem's Mishkan, while Pekudei shows precision and accountability. It lists measurements, numbers, and calculations.

Spirituality requires both passion and discipline. Passion and fervor spark growth and inspire us to build holiness, but discipline and consistency are what sustain it. It is easy to be moved by a powerful moment or message, yet only through structure and accountability can that inspiration become a lasting sanctuary for Hashem. As the Rambam explains, the purpose of the Mishkan was to bring the Divine into the world – but for Hashem's presence to dwell there continuously, it required consistency and careful structure. Perhaps this enduring message is the reason we unite these two parshiyot and read them together...

By (my dear friend) Shlomo YomTov

Just Imagine

There is an obligation on Pesach night: חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים – “In every generation, a person must see himself as if he left Egypt.” We are meant to feel as if we ourselves had experienced the exodus. An obvious question arises: if we were never in Egypt, how can we feel ourselves as having left? After all, we were never there.

R' Chatzkel Levenstein explained that imagination is key. We are to paint mental scenarios of how it must have felt to be enslaved, tortured, and then miraculously liberated. By imagining what happened in Egypt, we relive it, and in a sense, we are truly there.

If imagination is so crucial, however, why aren't we told to watch a show, play, or movie that makes the story look even more real? Wouldn't that give us a better picture than dozing off at the table at 2am around matzah crumbs and charoset?

The answer is profound. Imagination alone is not enough to truly feel as if we left Mitzrayim. We perform the mitzvot of the night – eating matzah and marror, drinking the four cups, and telling the story of the Haggadah – to remind us what happened and to give physical expression to the experience. At the same time, imagination allows us to picture the events and emotionally place ourselves there. If we only imagined it without the actions, the experience would remain abstract; if we only performed the actions without inner imagination, it could become routine. Only through the combination of both – imagination together with the mitzvot – do we create the full picture and reach the level of truly feeling, on an emotional and spiritual level, as if we ourselves left Egypt. In this way, the experience becomes far deeper than simply watching a play or a show, because we are not just observing the story; we are actively living it. That is what the Seder night is truly meant to feel like.

We are not meant to remember the past as distant history, but to relive it and internalize it. Through imagination we awaken our hearts, and through mitzvot we ground those feelings in action. When both work together, the experience becomes real for the soul.

Perhaps this is the deeper message of Pesach for every generation. Each of us has our own “Mitzrayim” – our own limitations, struggles, and places where we feel stuck. When we sit at the Seder and imagine leaving Egypt, we are not only remembering what happened thousands of years ago; we are reminding ourselves that redemption is always possible. Just as Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim then, He continues to guide us out of our personal Mitzrayim today. By engaging both our minds and our actions, our imagination and our mitzvot, we can allow the story of the Exodus to inspire us to move forward with faith, growth, and a deeper connection to Hashem.

By (my dear friend) Michael Suleymanov