



YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH RABBINICAL SCHOOL

WEEKLY PARSHA

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Parshat Vayakhel-Pikudei | March 8, 2013 / 27 Adar 5773

After the dramatic, and potentially catastrophic, events of the making of the Golden Calf and the breaking of the Tablets, God's wrath and Moshe's prayer, God's revelation of God's Glory to Moshe, the regiving of the Tablets and the rays of light emanating from Moshe's face, our parasha returns to narrative stream that had been disrupted by these events - the commanding and the building of the Mishkan. While the earlier parshiyot of Terumah and TiZaveh had related God's command in the donating and building of the Mishkan, parashat VaYakhel, together with next week's *parasha*, Pikudei, tell of the enactment of these commands - the actual donating and building that took place. This *parasha*, then, gets us back on track to the dominant narrative, before it was so rudely interrupted.

What is remarkable is that there seems to be no echo of those dramatic events, which came between the command and its enactment, in the actual enactment itself. It is as if the events of parashat Ki Tisa had not occurred. If one were to jump from chapter 31, verse 18, "And God gave to Moshe when God finished speaking to him on Mount Sinai, two tablets of stone, tablets written with the finger of God." to the first verse of this week's parasha, "And Moshe gathered the entire Congregation of the People of Israel and said to them, these are the things which God has commanded to do them," (Shemot 35:1), there would be no hint that something had happened in between the two. How is this possible? How could these tragic events not leave a mark?

I believe that these two questions answer each other. Our *parasha* provides an answer to the question of how a relationship can continue after it has suffered a serious rupture. Imagine that a husband has committed adultery and then his wife finds out. She feels betrayed; she is hurt and enraged, and seriously considers divorcing him. She even briefly moves out of the house and they live apart for a while. Then, after a serious process of soul-searching, regret, and contrition, the husband is able to fully own his betrayal, to seriously commit to change his ways, and

implores his wife to take him back. She is initially very reluctant, not only because she has been betrayed, but because she knows that this act was not out of character for the husband. Nevertheless, she relents, because in the end she loves him, and she believes that he is seriously committed to being a different person. They have a small, private ceremony of a reaffirmation of vows, and they resume their married life together.

Now comes the question - do they go on as if nothing has happened, or do they continuously live with the past? Neither solution is ideal - to continue as if nothing has changed is to possibly allow the same betrayal to occur again. To live with the betrayal front and center is to destroy any hope of rebuilding the relationship. The proper solution would seem to be to find a way to enact certain safeguards, certain small changes in behavior, which would serve as a protection against backsliding, but would not fill the relationship with guilt and recrimination. While it would be a disaster for the relationship for the wife to constantly hold this over the husband, it would be understandable for her protect herself more initially, and not be as giving emotionally or as fully of herself, until she can feel confident in the relationship once again.

This seems to be exactly what has occurred between God and the Children of Israel. The relationship of God and Israel is a covenantal one, based on fidelity and trust. When the Children of Israel worshiped the Golden Calf, either as another god, or as an idol meant to represent God, they betrayed God and committed a form of adultery. God declares that they have shown their true character, and it is impossible to go on living with them "You are a stiff-necked people. If I will dwell in your midst for one second, I will destroy you." Moshe prays to God, and God, after much importuning on Moshe's part, chooses to resume the relationship and to dwell in their midst. But we are left wondering if God is as fully recommitting to this relationship as before.

This ambiguity notwithstanding, God commits to resume the relationship, and God and Israel recommit to one another. Last week's *parasha* ended with a reaffirmation of the covenant, the repetition of some of the mitzvot in Mishpatim, and the regiving of the Tablets. This second giving, this second wedding, if you will, is a quiet ceremony with no fanfare, no thunder and lightning. Things are a little broken now, and both parties are reentering the relationship with a more realistic, less idealistic and romantic, view of the future.

And now they are ready to move forward. They put themselves back to the task of building the home that will house their life together - the Mishkan which will house God's presence and allow for their connection, their intimacy. The Torah then tells us, in painstaking detail, every single task that they did to donate to the Mishkan and to build it. The message seems inescapable -both sides are trying to proceed as if nothing has happened. It is all the same as before, they tell themselves, and one cannot even note a hint of the previous events.

Well, maybe a hint. For it is not what is said in this week's *parasha*, but what is not said. Moshe commands that the people donate to the building of the Mishkan, just as God had commanded in the beginning of parashat Terumah, with one notable difference. That original command ended with the climactic verse, "And they shall build for Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst." Such a verse is here completely absent. Without throwing it in their face, God is letting it be known that the relationship is more tentative than before. To rebuild the relationship takes time, and the people must work to restore the trust, to rebuild the relationship.

And a safeguard is put in. For in our *parasha*, the commandment of Shabbat precedes the commanding of the Mishkan. The reverse was true when God had commanded it originally (see Shemot 31:12-17). The juxtaposition of Shabbat and Mishkan says: "The Mishkan is the most intense connecting to God, but don't forget the Shabbat, the foundation of the relationship. Shabbat cannot be overridden for the sake of the building of the Mishkan." In a way, then, the building of the Mishkan represents the passion for connection, a passion that could sometimes, because it so yearns to connect, overstep its proper bounds. Shabbat, on the other hand, represents ongoing commitment, boundaries, rules, the reliable warmth of the

relationship, not its consuming fire.

The first time around, the focus was the passion that was bringing God and the People together. They needed to be reminded of the rules and the boundaries, but that came at the end - the relationship was defined by its passion. However, after the passion got out of hand, and so consumed the people that they turned it to the Calf when God or Moshe was not present, things had to change. The relationship this time around had to focus first and foremost on the rules, the boundaries, the establishment of trust, the warmth of the home. The passion could come, and it would come, but it could not dominate.

The second time around both God and the People were a less idealistic, less romantic. They had chosen, after an agonizing separation, to resume their relationship. It would resume in a subtle way somewhat more tentatively, and it would resume with an emphasis on its foundation, and the core connection of God and the People. One could say that the relationship was less intense as a result. But one could also say that this relationship, after having survived the tragedy that it did, and moving forward nonetheless, was all that much stronger. It was a relationship that was based on true depth, true commitment. It was a relationship that would outlast the test of time. **Shabbat Shalom!**

Upcoming YCT events:

- **Tenth Annual Tribute Dinner: March 10**

- **Pre-Pesach Night Seder: March 19**

Open to the community. Learn in our Beit Midrash.

- **Salute to Israel Parade: June 2**

Help us reach 60 participants by March 22nd deadline. Please contact abatalion@yctorah.org to sign up.

- **Save the Date: Semika Ceremony: June 9**

Join us in honoring the S. Daniel Abraham Semikha Fellows. This year David Fried, Bradley Hercman, Noah Leavitt, Aaron Lerner, Aaron Potek and Brachyahu Schonthal will be receiving *semikha* at the Jewish Center in Manhattan.

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