

Vayakhel

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Jewish history is complicated. All history is complicated, but Jewish history is particularly complicated because it tends to be convoluted as well. Maybe that's why we try to make it so straightforward even when it is not, dealing with it as if it is black and white when shades of gray exist

The Torah is not ashamed to speak about this. Quite the opposite. It seems to bare its heart by speaking about events that most of us would rather bury and hide. For example, when Shimon and Levi wiped out the city of Shechem in retaliation for the rape of their sister by Shechem's leader's son. They thought they were being Torah-sanctioned zealots—*kanoyim*—only to be later berated by their father as misguided vigilantes (*Bereishis* 34:30).

Then there was the sale of their brother, Yosef. Again, *l'Shem Shamayim*—for God and country. The best of the best were involved in that completely catastrophic incident, and they had also seen themselves as *kanoyim* of the highest level. Though we read the story and side with Yosef the whole way now, one has to wonder, “Had I been there, would I have gone along with the sale, or stopped it.”

The answer is disturbingly obvious. If the *Shivtei Kab* had seen fit to rid Jewish history of the ancestor of *Moshiach Ben Yosef*, why should we have been different? We wouldn't have been. Disturbing, very disturbing.

The principle is, “*The stone the builders despised became the cornerstone*” (*Tebillim* 118:22). Dovid *HaMelech* wrote it about himself, but he probably had Yosef *HaTzaddik* in mind as well. They suffered the same fates . . . rejected by their families who were the leaders of their generation . . . feeling abandoned by God . . . because of all that happened to them . . . instantaneously being raised up from the depths to the highest of heights to the shock of all those who had assumed that their destinies were to be the exact opposite.

And if we would have sold Yosef up a river, would we not have rejected Dovid *HaMelech* as well until God rubber-stamped him as the ancestor of *Moshiach Ben Dovid*? Again, disturbingly, yes. We probably also would have condemned Tamar to burn to death because Yehudah himself had ordered it, assuming that she was a harlot and not the righteous woman she proved to be.

And what would our reaction have been when Yehoshua *bin* Nun took Rachav the (past) prostitute as his wife? It could never happen today, but if it could, it would break people's *emunah* who would have difficulty with a *shidduch* made for a future *Gadol HaDor* that did not come from the best of Torah families.

Shabbos Day

THE POINT IS that Jewish history in the past often did not follow the path that we would have chosen for it and was often far from it. So where do we get off assuming that it can be straightforward in the Present and automatically reject anything that isn't? Nowhere does the Torah say that the Past was different and has nothing to do with the Present. On the contrary, overlooking the lessons of the Past is like forgetting that the flower above ground has roots below ground.

Has God not told us, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways*" (*Yeshayahu* 55:8)? That might have meant nothing if not for the fact that He runs our history. We wouldn't care what God thought if He was off doing His own thing. But He is off doing *our* thing, which means that we need to understand what He is doing and why, but we can't. Well, at least not always. . . or at least not always at the time we'd like to.

Yosef complained to the wine steward about his rough journey to nowhere until two years later he finally understood that he had been on a path to somewhere really important. Tamar must have wondered, as she was being taken out to be burned to death if her gamble had not paid off in the end. And how many times did Dovid's mother have to console him because his own father rejected him and his brothers treated him like nothing?

How often have we seen it in our own lives, albeit on a far less dramatic scale? How many times has what we thought was good ended up being the opposite, and vice-versa? We'd like life to follow the script we write for it, but so often we don't get to see it do so.

That is why one of the most important definitions of a wise person is, someone who can see what is being "born" (*Tamid* 32a). They have this ability to project the present into the future before it comes fact, and it becomes too late to do anything

about it. Most other people, the less wise ones, just deal with history as it seems at the moment, often misreading and mis-reacting to it. That's when we become our own worst enemy, and one of Jewish history as well.

There are people doing things today that they think are justified. They consider themselves heroic when in fact, the past says otherwise. They are responding to reality without considering that they could be misreading it, resulting in actions that, in the long run, will be destructive to them and the world.

Some people never get it until after it is too late, like the 100,000 Jews who could have left Germany before 1939 but didn't, claiming to be just as German as the next German. They stayed and found out otherwise. Some people got it, but just too late to do what they had to on their own terms. They left Europe while they still could, but had to run away and leave everything behind.

Then there is that group that historically, always seems to be rather small. They don't take anything for granted and consider that what they see may not be what is. They take past history into account to better understand the Present and wonder about the Future. They know that history is tricky, and they account for that.

This gives them a distinct advantage in life. It leaves them in a state of awareness and readiness, which gives them better control over their lives and reduces their chance of making mistakes. They're the kind of people *Parashas Shbekalim* is all about.

Seudas Shlishis

ON THE SURFACE of it, *Parashas Shbekalim* is about the half-*Shekel* every Jew was obligated to give in Temple times. It was a yearly fundraising effort to keep the Temple coffers full so that public sacrifices could continue all year long, as they're supposed to.

A *Shekel* is a Biblical currency, but a *mishkal*, from the word *Shekel*, is a scale for weighing things. The Aramaic version is "*Mishkalab*," and is the term used to describe one of the most important stages of *tikun* for the sake of making Creation. It refers to a certain balance that was given to Creation to make human history possible.

We see this replicated at the start of Jewish history. Avraham was the founder of the Jewish people, but not the only one. He was followed by Yitzchak, who was not only his son and heir, but his counterpart. Avraham embodied the trait of *Chesed* (which is masculine) and Yitzchak, the opposite trait of *Gevurah* (which is feminine).

But the Jewish people could not officially begin until Ya'akov was born who

embodied the trait of *Tifferes, Harmony*, the perfect balance between *Chesed* and *Gevurah*.

As the *Rambam* points out, there are times in life when a person must go to extremes. But that is only to get back to the proper balance that was previously lost, which led to the need to be extreme. That happens when people stop using their most important “scale” properly—their brain—and make incomplete, imbalanced, and often rash decisions.

We read *Parashas Shekalim* in advance of *Rosh Chodesh Adar* because that was when they began to collect *Machtzis-HaShekel* in Temple times. But it is one of the four *parshios* connected to *Purim*, a holiday that celebrates *Da’as*—balanced knowledge—and our recovery of it.

Because that is what brought Haman down into this world in Mordechai’s time, and Amalek into the world in Moshe’s time. And that is what is bringing down into our world the insanity all around us in preparation for our return to the proper and balanced *Da’as* of *Torah*.

And make no mistake about it. The imbalance is not only in the non-Torah world but in the Torah world as well. The balance is obviously not as extreme in the Torah world as it is in the secular world, but relatively speaking, it is *extreme*. Because everything in the spiritual world is always relative, so that what is considered pure on a lower spiritual level can actually be considered impure on a higher level.

In fact, the intellectual imbalance in the world can be attributed to the imbalance in the religious world, spiritually. As physically disconnected as the Torah world is from the secular one, spiritually they are attached through God. He uses the nations of the world as a means to tell the Jewish people where they are holding, as anti-Semitism reveals explicitly.

So, if we’re very disturbed by the direction of the *da’as* of the rest of the world, we should take a hard look at the direction of the *da’as* of our own world.

Melave Malkah

HENCE THE MENTION of *Shabbos* and the *Mishkan* in the same *parsha* that gathers together the entire nation. Both *Shabbos* and the *Mishkan* come to balance our perspectives in life. They are both big-picture realities, which is why they were discussed before the entire nation. Everything sounds and feels “bigger” when you are hearing it as part of a large collective.

The so-called “mob mentality” is only bad when the driving force behind it is selfish,

like protesting the loss of your favorite sports team, or because you feel personally denied without considering the larger need. But when it is God-driven, meaning that it is for selfless causes, such as rectification of the world, then it is a powerful tool for achieving a supernatural synergy.

Shabbos is the day of the week when we step back from the everyday, very distracting, mundane reality that forces us to think small. It is the day for thinking about the bigger picture of life, and where we fit into it. The *Mishkan*, and later the Temple, was the place to see that bigger picture in action firsthand. Is there anything bigger or more important than serving the Master of the Universe and feeling His Presence in the world?

That's why work on the *Mishkan* ceased on *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* was already what the *Mishkan* was to become, and once it was complete the service continued even on *Shabbos*. And when we do the same things in our own private lives, going beyond personal concerns when we can afford to think about the overall plan for Creation, we become like *Shabbos* and the *Mishkan*, both of which God dwells within.

That may seem very abstract and, quite frankly, quite impossible. It's not. It just takes a lot of work and good direction in life. And in not too long from now, when we finally cross the threshold to the Messianic Era, it will be the only way of life.

For essays on the current situation, go to www.shaarnunproductions.org.

Good *Shabbos*,
Pinchas Winston