



Detail-Oriented

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Parashat VaYakhel 5779

After much anticipation and quite detailed instruction, the building of the *mishkan* and the furnishing of its vessels begins in earnest in Parashat VaYakhel. Yet, before Betzalel and his workers are installed, the Torah reminds us of the call for contributions that we heard in Parashat Terumah along with an extensive and complete catalogue of the donations. Although the repetition isn't necessary, it is instructive. It demonstrates the importance of noticing small details and not taking anything for granted.

The overwhelming generosity of *Benei Yisrael* in contributing to the *mishkan* is fully and movingly documented by the Torah. It records that *Benei Yisrael* have been so incredibly giving, that the workers are being inundated with more material than they could possibly use:

שמות לו:ג-ז

וַיָּקֻחוּ מִלִּפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַמְּלָאכֶת עֲבֹדַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ וְהֵם הֵבִיאוּ אֵלָיו עוֹד נְדָבָה בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר: וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל הַחֲכָמִים הָעֹשִׂים אֶת כָּל מְלָאכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ אִישׁ אִישׁ מִמְּלָאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה עֹשִׂים: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר מְרֹבִים הָעָם לְהֵבִיא מִדֵּי הָעֲבֹדָה לַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ: וַיֵּצֵאוּ מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעֲבִירוּ קוֹל בְּמַחֲנֶה לֵאמֹר אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֵל יַעֲשׂוּ עוֹד מְלָאכָה לְתִרְוּמַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיָּקְלָא הָעָם מִהֵבִיא: וְהַמְּלָאכָה הַיְּתֵדָה דָּיִם לְכָל הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ וְהוֹתֵר:

Shemot 36:3-7

They took the contribution that *Benei Yisrael* brought to make for the work of the holy from before Moshe. And they brought additional contributions every single morning. All of the artisans who did the work of the holy, each one came from the work they had been doing and they said to Moshe, "The people are bringing much more than is necessary for the work that God has commanded to do!" Moshe commanded and they made a proclamation in the camp saying, "No man or woman should do more work in contributing to the holy." And the people stopped bringing. The [material] for the work was more than sufficient for all of the work to be done.



After knowing what the demands were of the *mishkan*'s building and weaving materials and learning that *Benei Yisrael*'s generosity met and exceeded those needs, it seems unnecessary and redundant for the Torah to have listed in exacting detail all that *Benei Yisrael* contributed to the building effort, yet the Torah does just that:

שמות לה:כא-כד

וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר נִדְּבָה רוּחוֹ אֶת הַבִּיאוֹ אֶת תְּרוּמַת ה' לְמִלְאֶכֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלָכֵל עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְלַבְגְּדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ: וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאָנָשִׁים עַל הַנָּשִׁים כָּל נְדִיב לֵב הַבִּיאוֹ חָח וְנָזָם וְטַבַּעַת וְכוּמָז כָּל כְּלֵי זָהָב וְכָל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְּיָדוֹ זָהָב לֵה': וְכָל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נָמָצָא אֹתוֹ תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִדִּים וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים הַבִּיאוּ: כָּל מְרִים תְּרוּמַת כֶּסֶף וְנִחְשֶׁת הַבִּיאוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַת ה' וְכָל אֲשֶׁר נָמָצָא אֹתוֹ עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים לְכָל מְלָאכֶת הָעֹבֶדָה הַבִּיאוּ: ...

Shemot 35:21-24¹

And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought God's offering to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments. So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to God. And everyone who possessed blue or purple or crimson yarn or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or fine leather, brought them. Everyone who could make an offering of silver or bronze brought it as God's offering; and everyone who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work, brought it...²

We have all of the above information without its being detailed, so the Torah could have sufficed with giving us a mere summary. However, the Torah chooses to provide a complete list instead: the four verses above and another five more listing not only the financial sacrifice, but also the time and effort to weave and embroider cloth for the *mishkan*. Perhaps this is because of the nature of the contributions. This money did not come from taxes that were levied, amounts that were predetermined that people were required to give. These contributions were voluntary donations; they were loving gifts. Each one arrives as a delight and a surprise. Listing the material in more minute detail gives us a truer description of the scope of this undertaking and shows the Torah's appreciation for every earring and every gemstone, for every hide and every lovingly spun thread. God doesn't just say, "Thanks for all the stuff and there was so much of it!" God says, "Thank you for every single thing you gave to Me. I see and appreciate each ounce of gold, each individual sacrifice and all of the small steps that were required for this monumental effort."

¹ The list of offerings continues for another five verses, to verse 29.

² Translation NRSV, emended.

One of the interesting details that accompanies the description of the donations is the timing and periodicity. They were **brought each and every morning**, **וַיָּבִיאוּ בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר**.³ When something happens every day without fail, a person can become inured to it. Because the donations arrive every morning they are even more likely to be taken for granted. But God sees and appreciates the work, how difficult it is in its dailiness. How difficult and how beautiful.

This same pattern subtly presents itself in the beginning of Bereishit. The creation of the world unfolds day by day, *boker* by *boker* and *erev* by *erev*. We, as the world's inhabitants, would know what the verse meant were it to be written, **בְּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ**, God created the heavens and the earth. Yet the Torah begins with the word **בְּרֵאשִׁית**, **at the beginning of** God's creation, a term that inaugurates a detailed description of the individual components of creation.⁴ Here is what was created at the beginning, and here is what was created next. And so on and so forth until we see the universe as we have it now. If I know that God created the whole world, of course I know that God has created every blade of grass and designed the eyes of even the tiniest creatures. I know this, but I am not aware of it. The text breaks the creation story into its constitutive pieces and forces the reader to pause at the end of each day and appreciate that God didn't just create the Universe, He labored on each tiny piece of it. God looks at "all" that He has done and declares that it is very good,⁵ but He also appreciates the goodness of the "each" that He has done.

This approach is reflected in a *mishnah* in Massekhet Avot:

משנה אבות ה:א

בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם. ומה תלמוד לומר, והלא במאמר אחד יכול להבראות! אלא להיפרע מן הרשעים שמאבדין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות וליתן שכר טוב לצדיקים שמקימין את העולם שנברא בעשרה מאמרות.

Mishnah Avot 5:1

The world was created in ten speech-acts. And what does this come to teach? Could it not have been created in just one speech-act! Rather it comes to extract retribution from the wicked who destroy the world which was created in ten speech-acts and to give good reward to the righteous who uphold the world which was created in ten speech-acts.

This *mishnah* highlights that God in the Torah's narration creates the world with a complex set of ten speech-acts, *ma'amarot*, as opposed to just creating the world instantly, which was

³ This formulation appears twice more in the Exodus narrative. The manna fell every morning without fail and Aharon brings the *ketoret* incense each morning (Shemot 16:21, 30:7).

⁴ Bereishit 1:1.

⁵ Bereishit 1:31.

certainly within God's power. However, the conclusion that the Mishnah draws from this is surprising: why does this fact serve to increase the punishment for the wicked and the righteous person's reward? Perhaps this is due to the attitude of the wicked and the righteous respectively. The wicked don't think about anyone but themselves. They don't have regard for the feelings of other people and therefore slander them, they don't have regard for the hard work of other people and therefore feel no real guilt in choosing to steal from them, they don't feel gratitude for the world that God has created and do not treat the life that has been granted to them as a sacred gift. This lack of sensitivity allows them to behave in a destructive manner. The righteous, on the other hand, see the effort that it took to create the world, they see its intricacies and value it. They show respect for the accomplishments of other people, are sensitive to their feelings, and treat God and His world with respect. The ten speech-acts are a method for sensitizing us to the complexity of creation and its true value. The wicked aren't paying attention and therefore feel free to destroy whatever they touch, but the righteous hear, appreciate, and learn from these details and behave accordingly.

It is critical that in our relationships with each other and our relationship with God we see and understand all of the details. We need to appreciate that every step takes effort and needs to be recognized. This is the strategy of Psalm 136, known as Hallel HaGadol, the great Hallel, which we recite at the Seder (and is the basis for the Dayeinu hymn):⁶

תהילים פרק קלו:א,ה-ז,י-יב,כג-כו

הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו: ... לעשה השמים בתבונה כי לעולם חסדו: לרקע הארץ על המים כי לעולם חסדו: לעשה אורים גדלים כי לעולם חסדו: ...
למכה מצרים בבכוריהם כי לעולם חסדו: ויוצא ישראל מתוכם כי לעולם חסדו: ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה כי לעולם חסדו: ... שבשפילנו זכר לנו כי לעולם חסדו: ויפרקנו מצרינו כי לעולם חסדו: נתן לחם לכל בשר כי לעולם חסדו: הודו לאל השמים כי לעולם חסדו:

Tehillim 136:1, 5-16, 23-26.

Give thanks to God, for He is good, for His lovingkindness forever endures... To He who made the heavens with understanding; His lovingkindness forever endures. To He who spreads out the earth on the waters; His lovingkindness forever endures. To He who made the great lights; His lovingkindness forever endures...

To He who struck Egypt through their firstborn; His lovingkindness forever endures. And brought Israel out from among them; His lovingkindness forever endures. With a strong hand and an outstretched arm; His lovingkindness forever endures... For He remembered us in our low state; His lovingkindness forever endures. And rescued us from our oppressors; His lovingkindness forever endures. He gives food to all flesh; His

⁶ This psalm is also recited as part of the introductory psalms, Pesukei D'Zimrah, on Shabbat and Holiday morning prayers.

lovingkindness forever endures. Give thanks to the God of heaven! His lovingkindness forever endures.

This poem has two great demonstrations of God's power and goodness as its theme: the creation of the world and the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. In both of these narrations the poet stops at each possible opportunity to thank God for the smaller, incremental accomplishments. The poet praises God at junctures that do not seem to be independent moments of the narrative in order to notice and praise God every single step of the way, even if each step on its own could feel insignificant.

This approach is the approach of the great or large Hallel, to show that even stages which do not seem large or momentous are nevertheless great. And when we divide an enormous event into smaller moments we are able to magnify it even more. We thereby increase our awareness of God's kindness to us and it leads us to thank Him again and again. Each time we thank Him, and He feels appreciated by us, our appreciation of one another grows and it strengthens our relationship.

It isn't enough to say thank you once and move on. We need to pay close attention to the smaller steps and thank each other and God for every component. Don't just say "thanks for dinner." Appreciate the time and effort it takes to plan a meal, shop for groceries, peel and chop the vegetables, and stand over the stove on tired feet. When you understand this, not only will your gratitude be more deeply felt and more genuinely expressed, the meal will become more satisfying to you, as you become able to taste the love and the effort that went into its preparation.

And as we grow in sensitization and appreciation, let us also grow in our attention to the process. Let us respect the small details that go into producing large-scale results and value them.

Wishing you a Shabbat of awareness and gratitude.

