

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS VAYAKHEL

The Morrow of Yom Kippur

And Moshe congregated the entire Children of Israel... (Ex. 35:1). Rashi explains that this happened on the day after Yom Kippur. Rabbi Dovid Segal HaLevi, author of *Turei Zabav (TaZ)* writes in *Divrei Dovid* to Ex. 35:1 that Rashi understood that this happened on the day after Yom Kippur because it says that Moshe gathered up the *entire* Jewish People, as if to imply that **the people themselves were also complete**. This “completion” of the people themselves was only achieved on Yom Kippur, when Hashem forgave the Jewish People for the sin of the Golden Calf and they attained completion. Accordingly, Moshe must have gathered them up on the very next day. Rabbi Yonason Shteif (*Amaros 2*) offers another reason as to why this must have happened the day after Yom Kippur based on the *Kli Yakar*. He explains that the custom among Jews is that on Erev Yom Kippur, each person forgives his friends for whatever they may have done during the span of the previous year, such that peace is the prevailing attitude between all Jews come Yom Kippur. To that effect, the Midrash (*Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 46) says that Jewish People on Yom Kippur resemble angels, and of the reasons for that comparison, is that just as there is no animosity between angels in Heaven, so are the Jewish People on Yom Kippur at peace with one another. The Midrash implies that this aura of peace between all Jews lasts for only one day—Yom Kippur—but immediately afterwards all sorts of strife and controversy return and the peace is shattered. Based on this, Rabbi Shteif explains that the most opportune time to gather the entirety of the Jewish People would be on the day after Yom Kippur, with Moshe Rabbenu’s implied message that we should strive to maintain all yearlong that interpersonal peace with each other that we achieved on Yom Kippur.

The Number 27

Do not kindle a fire in all your dwellings on the Day of Shabbos (Ex. 35:3). This verse has 27 letters in it. Rabbi Avraham Baruch Mani (son of Rabbi Eliyahu Suleiman Mani), the Rav in Chevron, who died at the age of 27 (!) in the year 1882 explains (*Baruch Avraham* p. 215) the significance of this through citing the *Bnei Yisaschar* (beginning of *Maamar HaShabbosos*) that the word Shabbos (שבת = 702) equals 27 times the *gematria* of Hashem’s four letter name (יהוה = 26).

The Princes’ Last Stand

And the princes brought the Shoham stones and Miluim stones for the ephod and the choshen (Ex. 35:27). The word “and the princes” (והנשאים) is spelled without the letter *yod* which is part of the plural suffix. The *Sifrei* (to Num. 7:3) explains that the Torah

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misspelled the word referring to the princes in order to criticize them for waiting until the end to bring their donation towards the construction of the Tabernacle. Why, of all the letters in their name was the letter *yod* taken out? Rabbi Ephraim Lunshitz in *Kli Yakar* explains that when the princes decided to hold off on giving their donations, they did so out of haughtiness. They said, “Let everyone else first bring their donation, and whatever is still missing, we’ll bring.” They did not consider themselves one with the masses, but rather above the masses. The letter *yod*, on the other hand, is the smallest and most inconsequential letter of the Hebrew Alphabet. In this way, the letter *yod* alludes to the concept of humility. Because the princes acted out of haughtiness, they lost their letter *yod* which symbolizes the idea of being humble. Moreover, by saying “Let everyone else first bring their donation, and whatever is still missing, we’ll bring”, the princes slighted the public-at-large by implying that even after their greatest efforts, they will still be lacking or missing something. This runs contrary to the leadership qualities expected of the princes who should be leading by example and showing how one can grow in Torah and fear of God. Instead of doing that, they were focusing on the weaknesses of their constituents and placing themselves on a higher pedestal.

Betzalel—Master Craftsman

And to teach He put in his [Betzalel’s] heart (Ex. 35:32). Ibn Ezra, *Ohr HaChaim*, and Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen of Tzas (*Sifsei Kohen* here) explain that some artisans are experts in their craft, but lack the ability to teach the trade to others. Betzalel, on the other hand, was not only an expert artisan, but even had the acumen to teach others the skills he had and impart his knowledge onto them.

Being Held Back

And the nation held back from bringing (Ex. 36:6). *Baal HaTurim* (to Gen. 8:2) writes that the word “and he held back” (ויכלא) appears twice in the Bible, once here when the Jews held back from bringing more supplies for the Tabernacle, and once after the Deluge when Hashem held back additional rains from falling. The *Kli Yakar* (to Ex. 35:27) explains the connection between these two contexts by asserting that when people hold themselves back from donating what is expected of them, then Hashem holds back the rain from the land.

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The Wise and Laborious

And all the wise-hearted people performed the laborious work (Ex. 36:8). Rabbi Chaim Ibn Attar in *Or HaChaim* explains that this verse means to imply that *because* they carried out these labors, those involved became *wise-hearted*.

From Mirrors or With Mirrors?

And he made the kiyor [out of] copper, and its base was copper, with the multitudes' mirrors who gathered at the entrance to the Tent of the Meeting (Ex. 38:2). The Ibn Ezra explains that the letter ך as a prefix to the word “with the multitudes’ mirror” functions as though it were a prefix ם, meaning that the verse means that the *kiyor* was fashioned *from* the multitudes’ mirrors, not *with* their mirrors. See also Ibn Ezra to Ps. 72:16, and Radak to I Chron. 5:8. However, they ask on the Ibn Ezra from the a Talmudic passage which seems to imply that a ך at the beginning of a word cannot function as a ם. It says, “I promised to Hashem in Chevron” (II Sam. 15:7) which the Gemara (*Temurah* 14b) considers to mean that he promised to bring a sacrifices of animals *from* Chevron. However, the Talmud rejects this understanding by reasoning that if it meant *from* Chevron it should have said it with a ם not with a ך. Rather, he meant that he promised to give the sacrifice in Chevron. This clearly implies that a ך can be used as a prefix to mean the same thing that a ם does.¹ The *Imrei Kohen* (*Shemos, milluim* p. 274 36) answers that everything depends on the context. In a case were explaining that a ך means “from” does not contradict the plain reading of the passage, then one can do so (like the Ibn Ezra does here), but if it does contradict the plain reading of the passage (like it does by King David), then one cannot interpret the ך to mean “from” like a ם.

The Multitudes’ Mirrors

And he made the kiyor [out of] copper, and its base was copper, with the multitudes' mirrors who gathered at the entrance to the Tent of the Meeting (Ex. 38:2). Rashi explains that “the multitudes’ mirrors” refers to the mirrors which the Jewish women had that they would use to adorn themselves. They even brought those mirrors as donations to the construction of the Tabernacle. When they did so, Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to reject such donations, because these mirrors were used for the purposes of beautifying the women and enticing the Evil Inclination. However, Hashem told him that those mirrors are the

¹ The truth is, that it’s not so appropriate to ask such a question on the Ibn Ezra from what the Gemara says, because Ibn Ezra regularly interprets Biblical passages contra the interpretation of the Rabbis in the Talmud and/or Midrash.

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dearest to Him from all the donations, because the women used these mirrors to bear the multitudes of Jews in Egypt, for when they were enslaved, and they husbands would return home after a long day at work, they would bring their husbands food and drink, and then they would use these mirrors in propositioning their husbands and becoming pregnant and bearing children. The *keiyor* was also involved in making peace between man and wife, because the suspected adulteress (*sotah*) would drink from the waters of the *keiyor* in order to prove whether or not she had actually sinned against her husband. *Kli Yakar* explains that these two idea are interrelated, as the women were specifically involved in the construction of the *keiyor* because the *keiyor* was used for testing the suspected adulteress, and by being involved in constructing that device, they showed that they themselves should not be suspect of any such improprieties. Moreover, there is a thematic connection between the *sotah* waters, and a mirror: Just as the *sotah* waters are an impartial mechanism to determine whether or not a suspected adulteress really committed adultery, so is a mirror an impartial device used to tell if one is beautiful or ugly. *Kli Yakar* further notes that the *keiyor* served to prove that the woman who propositioned their husbands in Egypt acted decently, and were not promiscuous engaged with the Egyptian men when their husbands were too tired for them. In this way, the *keiyor* again proves that they were chaste. Moreover, *Kli Yakar* explains that the “Tent of the Meeting” cannot refer to the place in the Tabernacle from which Hashem spoke to Moshe, because the Tabernacle was not yet erected. Rather, he explains that it refers to the private place where women would engage in intimacy with their husbands. This is an allusion to the modesty of the women involved, just as Rashi (to Gen. 18:8) explains that the angels asked Abraham “where is your wife Sarah?” in order that he should answer “she is in the tent” and thereby accentuate her trait of modesty. According, stressing that these women gathered in the Tent of the Meeting similarly serves to stress their decency in that they would meet up with their husbands in a private and modest way.

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Vayakhel

Crowns, Forgetfulness and Shabbos

And Moshe gathered all the adas of the Jewish people, and he told them, “These are the things that Hashem has commanded you to do: For six days, your work shall be done, and the seventh shall be holy, a Shabbos of rest, for Hashem; he who does labor on it will die.”

Shemos 35:1–2

“The Jewish people left their jewelry at Horeb.”² “R. Simai taught, ‘When the Jewish people said the words *naaseh vinishma* – we will do and we will listen – 600,000 ministering angels came to each and every Jew, and fastened for him two crowns, one for *naaseh*, and one for *nishma*. When the Jewish people sinned by fashioning a Golden Calf, 1,200,000 angels of destruction came and removed them, as the verse says, “The Jewish people left their [spiritual] jewelry at the mountain of Horeb.”’”³ The Gemara goes on to say that Moshe then gathered up all of the “crowns” that the Jewish people had left behind.

Moshe, in our Parsha, gathers all of the Jewish people together. The word used for the assembly of Jewish people is *adas*. Moshe gathered the *adas* of the Jewish people. The Apter Rav⁴ tells us that there is more going on here. The word used for the crowns of the Jewish people, which they left behind when they sinned at the Golden Calf, was *edyam*. This shares the same root as the word *adas*. What Moshe gathered, says the Apter Rav, was the lost jewelry of the Jews. He first took their lost crowns, and then gathered the people and taught them about the Shabbos. Moshe wanted to return these crowns to the Jewish people. “Moshe was satisfied with his portion,”⁵ explains the Apter Rav, means that he was happy with what he originally received, and made it his business to help the Jewish people reconnect with their own crowns. He did that, somehow, through the Shabbos. The Arizal⁶

2 Shemos 33:6

3 Shabbos 88a

4 *Ohev Yisrael* to Vayakhel. See also *Torah Emes* (Apta) to Vayakhel. In *Agra Dikallah* here, the Bnei Yissaschar also suggests this reading of the verse.

5 Shabbos Shacharis Shmoneh Esrei

6 *Shaar Hakavanos, Kaballas Shabbos, drush 1. Mishnas Chasidim, Shacharis Dishabbos*, 8.

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teaches us that on Shabbos, Moshe gives these crowns back to the Jewish people. Only through our connection to Shabbos do we identify with these crowns.

But what are these crowns, and why did we lose them when we did? How do we get them back through Shabbos?

When the Jewish people sinned, it says in the Torah, regarding these crowns, that the people “did not place their [spiritual] jewelry on them.”⁷ In the very next verse,⁸ the Torah tells us that Hashem spoke to Moshe and told him that the Jewish people are not to wear their crowns! This is troubling, since the previous verse tells us that no Jew had *shas* (literally, “placed”) his jewelry on him.⁹ How can one be told to take off something that he was never wearing in the first place? The Chozeh of Lublin¹⁰ explains that the word for “placed,” *shas*, also means to take something to heart, as we find when the Torah talks of Pharaoh “not taking this to heart either.”¹¹ He explains that the Jewish people, even after the sin of the Golden Calf, remained nevertheless wearing their crowns. We are connected to God at all times, even when we have sinned. But the *passuk* tells us that “the Jewish people did not take to heart that their crowns were on them.” They did not realize that they were still wearing these crowns, and therefore, they were told to “take them off.” If you do not realize that you are still connected even after sin, then you, in fact, lose some of that connection.¹²

Shabbos teaches that even after sin, one is still connected. When Adam sinned, he nevertheless was given one Shabbos in Eden before he was expelled.¹³ Every Shabbos is a taste of the World to Come.¹⁴ Even if a person worships idols, as the generation of Enosh did, if he keeps the Shabbos, he is forgiven.¹⁵ Shabbos is the source of blessing for the whole week.¹⁶ Shabbos brings forgiveness for mistakes,¹⁷ for it is the center of our universe. We

7 Shemos 33:4

8 Ibid., 34:5

9 See *Sifsei Koben al Hatorah*, and *Maskil Lidavid* there.

10 Quoted in *Tefilah Limoshe to Vayakhel*

11 Shemos 7:23

12 See also *Yalkut Hagershuni to Orach Chaim* (p. 7a) *likkutim shonim*, quoting R. Yitzchak Elchanan, who also understands the word *shas* to mean “taking to heart,” though he understands that *passuk* slightly differently. *Yalkut Meam Loez* also does something similar.

13 *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer*, 20

14 Brachos 57b. See also Maharal in *Netzach Yisrael*, 46, where he discusses at length how Yom Tov is a taste of the days of Moshiach, and Shabbos is a taste of *Olam Habah*.

15 Shabbos 118b

16 *Zohar*, vol. 2, 88a. See also Lecha Dodi, “*ki hi mikor habracha*.”

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work for six days, and on the seventh, we have Shabbos. The Torah tells us that we *are* to work for six days, but that it is all to surround our Shabbos. We are to take from our lives and bring into Shabbos, and we are meant to realize how futile the rest of it is without Shabbos. Our first step toward forgiveness and atonement is when we stop identifying with our sins. When we know that, in fact, we are not really that person, for we only live for Shabbos – the days of connection and Heaven in this world – then, we begin to detach from our mistakes. When we realize that we are here for *Olam Habah*, for our souls are the main thing, and our mistakes do not really ever touch our souls, then through the message of the Shabbos, “*yoma dinishmasa*” (day of the soul),¹⁸ we can reclaim our crowns. We can discover that they never left us. Our sins can never really penetrate our cores, and our mistakes can never really destroy our pure souls. We learn this from the Shabbos, and when we discover this, we can then also discover that we are, in fact, still wearing our crowns.

Those crowns came through 600,000 angels, and yet, they left through twice as many. Each person was brought a crown for *naaseh* (“we will do”) and one for *nishma* (“we will listen”) by the same angels. This is important. As long as the Jewish people identified themselves with their beliefs, and the actions that were theirs were only the ones that were guided by the *nishma*, then they were both still brought by one angel. An angel only has one mission. The two crowns were really the same thing, and thus, one angel could bring them. The crowns were two, but really one, for they were a product of the Jewish people identifying with the reality that we are really only a soul, and a soul that wants to do the will of God. There is nothing else. No other action could possibly be mine, or yours.

But when they sinned, and they did not act properly, they lost those crowns; they were separated and removed. When the Jews said *naaseh vinishma*, a voice came from Heaven, comparing them to angels,¹⁹ for, indeed, having only one focus and one mission is what the angel has. But when they sinned, no longer did the actions of the Jewish people reflect their awareness that they were really nothing more than people acting out the directives of Truth. Now they saw themselves as people who could have the *naaseh* and the *nishma* separated. And so, there were two angels needed to remove these two crowns, for these two crowns were no longer connected, no longer one unit.²⁰ Though a person is only really his soul, and the rest is insignificant, after this sin, the Jews were once again people viewing their souls as only a *part* of their being.

17 See this elaborated upon by *Sfas Emes*, Shekalim, 5632, s.v. *Chazal*.

18 *Zohar*, vol. 2, 205a, and vol. 3, 95a.

19 Shabbos 88a

20 See R. Moshe Shapiro’s *Afikei Mayim* to Shavous, 42, where he discusses this more fully.

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When the Jewish people sinned at the Golden Calf, and Moshe dropped the Tablets, all of the letters flew off of the Tablets.²¹ And yet, wondered the Imrei Emes of Ger,²² we say every Shabbos morning²³ that when Moshe came back with the tablets, “guarding the Shabbos” was written on them. Before they broke, all of the commandments were on them, not just Shabbos; and afterward, none of them were. What is special about the Tablets’ having Shabbos written on them? The Imrei Emes explains that, in fact, even after everything flew off of the Tablets, the commandment of Shabbos remained there! We only forget any Torah, says the Gemara,²⁴ because of the disconnect that was created when the *Luchos* were broken. Thus, writes the Sfas Emes,²⁵ when one learns Torah on Shabbos, he does not forget it!²⁶ The Shabbos is something that we can never, ever forget, at any time.²⁷ The level that the Jew was on before the sin, grew lost to him, because he did not realize that he was still there. The fellow who has the winning lottery ticket in his old pants pocket but never checks for it has, in a way, not really won the lottery. He will never use that money at all. The Shabbos is there to remind us that we never lost our crowns. We are always connected to that time when we received the Torah, and the Tablets were whole. We would never forget. We got both of our crowns. Moshe just wanted us to know that we still have those crowns. So he collected them all, and then, he taught us about the Shabbos.

“Moshe was happy with the gift of his portion; You placed a glorious crown on his head when he stood before You on Mount Sinai, and he brought down two tablets of stone, with ‘guarding the Shabbos’ written on them!”²⁸

21 Shemos Rabbah 46:1

22 *Likkutei Yehuda* to Ki Sisa, p. 97a

23 Shabbos Shacharis Shmoneh Esrei

24 Eruvin 54a

25 Ki Sisa 662

26 Perhaps we can thus understand the words of the Yerushalmi (Shabbos, ch. 15) that the Shabbos was only given to the Jewish people in order that they learn Torah on it. And this also explains the words of the Arizal (*Pri Etz Chaim, shaar Hanbagas Halimud*, 1) that the words from Mishlei (24:14), “*deeb chochmah linafsbech*” (know wisdom for your soul) have the same *gematria* as “Shabbos,” for Shabbos is a day when one connects to Torah learning in the deepest of ways.

27 Shemos 20:8

28 Shmoneh Esrei, Shacharis of Shabbos.

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