

Immediately after his return from the mountain top, having secured forgiveness for the people after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses assembles them and commands them, first, about the Sabbath, and then about the making of the Tabernacle. The *parasha* repeats much of what was said earlier in *parashat Teruma*, with this difference: that there we read the instructions, here, their execution. The people give willingly, and Betzalel and Oholiab, the craftsmen, fashion the various structures.

The first of the following essays looks at the different placements of the command about Shabbat, here and in the earlier account. Here it precedes the commands about the Tabernacle, there it followed them. Why the difference? The second looks at the word that gives the *parasha* its name, *Vayak-hel*, a word with the same root as *kehilla*, community. There are three forms of community in Judaism. What are their differences? The third asks why the long account of the Tabernacle appears in Exodus, a book about nation-building. The answer to this question has a surprising relevance to the problems of today's multicultural societies. The fourth, taking its cue from Betzalel's artistry, explores the place of aesthetics in Judaism.

With *Pekudei*, the book of Exodus reaches its end, if not its closure. Moses orders an account to be made of all the donations given for the making of the Tabernacle and how they were used. The priestly garments are made. Moses finally erects the Tabernacle, and it becomes filled with the glory of the Lord.

In the essays that follow the first looks at the principle of accountability for the use of public funds, as exemplified by Moses. The second looks at the Tabernacle as a symbol of the sacred order that lies at the foundation of a social order. The third analyzes a textual difficulty in the last two words of the book of Exodus. As interpreted by Rashi, they provide an insight into Jewish history and identity as a whole. The fourth looks at the narrative structure of the book of Exodus, the pattern beneath the surface, showing how tightly it, together with Genesis, form a literary unit of immense coherence and power.

***The Sabbath: First Day or the Last?*¹**

In the immensely lengthy and detailed account of the making of the Tabernacle, the Torah tells the story twice: first as divine instruction (Exo 25:1—31:17), then as human implementation (chs. 35—40). In both cases,

the construction of the building is juxtaposed with the command of keeping the Sabbath (31:12-17; 35:1-2).

There are halakhic and theological implications to this. First, according to Jewish tradition, **the juxtaposition was intended to establish the rule that the Sabbath overrides the making of the Tabernacle.**⁽¹⁾

1. Shabbat 49b

Again they⁽⁵⁾ sat and pondered: Regarding what we learnt, The principal categories of labour⁽⁶⁾ are forty less one—to what do they correspond?⁽⁷⁾—Said R. Hanina b. Hama to them: **To the forms of labour in the Tabernacle.**⁽⁸⁾

(5) The Rabbis maintained above.

(6) Forbidden on the Sabbath; for aboth, lit., 'fathers', v. supra 2b.

(7) On what basis are they selected?

(8) **Every form of labour necessary in the Tabernacle was regarded as a principal category of work forbidden on the Sabbath.** This is learnt from the juxtaposition of the commands concerning the Sabbath and the erection of the Tabernacle, Ex. XXXV, 1-3;4 seq.

Not only is the seventh day a time when secular work comes to an end. **It also brings rest from the holiest of labours: making a house for God.** Indeed, the oral tradition defined *melakha*, "creative work, craft,"—that which is prohibited on the Sabbath—**in terms of the thirty-nine activities involved in making the Sanctuary.**

2. "Work" specifically prohibited in the *Tenach* includes: 1) lighting a fire (Exo 35:3), 2) baking and cooking (Exo 16:23), 3) gathering wood (Num 15:32-36), 4) moving out of a proscribed area (Exo 16:29), 5) plowing and harvesting (Exo 34:21), 6) carrying a load (Jer 17:21-27), 7) engaging in business (Isa 58:13) and 8) buying and selling (Neh.13:15-22).

"Work" prohibited in the building of the Tabernacle, based upon the classification system of the Rabbis includes: 1) sowing, 2) plowing, 3) reaping, 4) binding sheaves, 5) threshing, 6) winnowing, 7) selecting, 8) grinding, 9) sifting, 10) kneading, 11) baking, 12) shearing wool, 13) washing wool, 14) beating wool, 15) dyeing wool, 16) spinning, 17) weaving, 18) making two loops, 19) weaving two threads, 20) separating two threads, 21) tying, 22) untying, 23) sewing two stitches, 24) tearing, 25) trapping, 26) slaughtering, 27) flaying, 28) salting meat, 29) curing hide, 30) scraping hide, 31) cutting hide up, 32) writing two letters, 33) erasing two letters, 34) building, 35) tearing a building down, 36) extinguishing a fire, 37) kindling a fire, 38) hitting with a hammer, 39) taking an object from the private domain to the public or transporting an object in the public domain.

3. What is "work?"

Is it gainful employment?—Yes, but then it would be O.K. for an electrical contractor to paint a friend's home on the Sabbath. No? Why not? Be-

1 Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Exodus*, (Maggid Books & The Orthodox Union), pp. 279-282.

cause, according to the Rabbis, **work must be defined in such a way that it applies equally to every member of the community.**

Does “work” depend of the amount of energy expended or the fatigue involved?—No. Otherwise, the Sabbath would vary according to the physique, skill and stamina of each individual.

Is work for one, pleasurable for another?—Perhaps, but that does not determine what “work” is either. The early Rabbis formulated a comprehensive classification of the categories of labor forbidden on the Sabbath from the various references of prohibited types of work mentioned in the Bible (M. Shab. 7:2).

They based their classification on the fact that the Sabbath commandment was repeated to Moses immediately after he was given instructions regarding the construction of the Tabernacle—and that the construction of the Tabernacle was forbidden on the Sabbath.

At a more metaphysical level, the Sanctuary mirrors—is the human counterpart to—the divine creation of the universe.⁽²⁾ **Just as divine creation culminates in the Sabbath, so too does human creation. The sanctity of place takes second place to the holiness of time.**⁽³⁾

4. Technical civilization is man’s conquest of space. **It is a triumph frequently achieved by sacrificing an essential ingredient of existence, namely, time.** In technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. To enhance our power in the world of space is our main objective. **Yet to have more does not mean to be more.** The power we attain in the world of space terminates abruptly at the borderline of time. But time is the heart of existence.

To gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks. **The danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time. There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord. Life goes wrong when the control of space, the acquisition of things of space, becomes our sole concern.**²

5. Pagans project their consciousness of God into a visible image or associate Him with a phenomenon in nature, with a thing of space. In the Ten Commandments, **the Creator of the universe identifies Himself by an event in history, by an event in time, the liberation of the people from Egypt**, and proclaims: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth, or that is in the water under the earth” ...

The most precious thing that has ever been on earth were the Two Tablets of stone which Moses received upon Mount Sinai; they

were priceless beyond compare. He had gone up into the Mount to receive them: there he abode forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water ... But when coming down the Mount at the end of forty days and forty nights—the Two Tablets in his hands—Moses saw the people dance around the Golden Calf, **he cast the Tablets out of his hands and broke them before their eyes.**³

However, there is one marked difference between the account of God’s instruction to Moses to build the Sanctuary, and Moses’ instruction to the people. In the first case, **in the *parasha* of *Ki Tissa*, the command of the Sabbath appears at the end**, after the details of the construction. **In the second, in *Vayak-hel*, it appears at the beginning**, before the details.

Why so?

The Talmud raises the following question: what happens if you are far away from human habitation and you forget what day it is? How do you observe the Sabbath? Two answers are offered:

R. Huna said: “If one is travelling on a road or in the wilderness and does not know when it is the Sabbath, he must count six days [from the day he realises he has forgotten] and observe one.” R. Hiyya b. Rav said: “He must observe one, and then count six [week] days.” On what do they differ? One master holds that it is like the world’s creation. The other holds that it is like [the case of] Adam.⁽⁴⁾

From God’s point of view the Sabbath was the seventh day. From the point of view of the first human beings—created on the sixth day—the Sabbath was the first. The debate is about which perspective we should adopt. Thus, at the simplest level, **we understand why the Sabbath comes last when God is speaking about the Tabernacle, and why it comes first when Moses, a human being, is doing so. For God, the Sabbath was the last day of creation; for human beings it was the first.**

However, there is something more fundamental at stake. When it comes to divine creation, there is no gap between intention and execution. God spoke, and the world came into being.⁽⁵⁾ In relation to God, Isaiah says: “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isa 46:10). God knows in advance how things will turn out.

With human beings, it is otherwise. Often, we cannot see the end at the beginning, the outcome at the outset. A great novelist may not know how the story will turn out until he has written it, nor a composer, a symphony, nor an artist, a painting. Creativity is fraught with risk. All the more is it so with human history. The “law of unintended consequences” tells us that revolutions rarely turn out as planned. Policies designed to help the poor may have the opposite effect.⁽⁶⁾ Hayek coined the phrase “the fatal conceit” for what he saw as the almost inevitable failure of so-

2 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 95.

cial engineering—the idea that you can plan human behaviour in advance.⁽⁷⁾ You can't. Therefore, large-scale social engineering is bound to fail.⁽⁸⁾

One alternative is simply to let things happen as they will. This kind of resignation, however, is wholly out of keeping with the Judaic view of history. The sages said: "Wherever you find the word *vayehi* ['and it came to pass'] it is always a prelude to tragedy."⁽⁹⁾ When things merely come to pass, they rarely have a happy ending.

The other solution—unique, as far as I know to Judaism—is **to reveal the end at the beginning. That is the meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not simply a day of rest. It is an anticipation of "the end of history," the messianic age.** On it, we recover the lost harmonies of the Garden of Eden. **We do not strive to do; we are content to be.** We are not permitted to manipulate the world; instead, we celebrate it as God's supreme work of art. We are not allowed to exercise power or dominance over other human beings, nor even domestic animals. Rich and poor inhabit the Sabbath alike, with equal dignity and freedom.

No utopia has ever been realized (the word "utopia" itself means "no place")—with one exception: "the world to come." The reason is that we rehearse it every week, one day in seven. The Sabbath is a full dress rehearsal for an ideal society that has not yet come to pass, but will do, because we know what we are aiming for—because we experienced it at the beginning.

6. Hebrews 4:1-10

¹Therefore, since **the promise of entering his rest still stands ...** ²For we also have had **the good news** proclaimed to us, **just as they did;** but **the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.** ³Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So **I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest'**" (Psa 95:11). And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴For somewhere he has spoken about **the seventh day** in these words: "On the seventh day God rested from all his works" (Gen 2:2). ⁵And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." ⁶Therefore since **it still remains for some to enter that rest,** and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, ⁷**God again set a certain day, calling it "Today."** This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts**" (Psa 95:7). ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹**There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;** ¹⁰for anyone who enters **God's rest** also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

¹¹Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

a. But Joshua *did* give them rest!

1) Joshua 21:44

⁴⁴**The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors ...**

b. So, what *rest* is the author of Hebrews referring to?

1) Sanhedrin 110b

THE GENERATION OF THE WILDERNESS HATH NO PORTION IN THE WORLD TO COME etc. Our Rabbis taught: The generation of the wilderness hath no portion in the world to come, as it is written, in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.⁽²⁾ 'they shall be consumed,' refers to this world; **'and there they shall die'—to the world to come.** And it is also said, Forty years long was I grieved with his generation ... Unto whom I swear in my wrath that **they should not enter into my rest:**⁽³⁾ this is R. Akiba's view. R. Eliezer maintained: **They will enter into the future world,** for it is written, Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.⁽⁴⁾ How then do I interpret⁽⁵⁾ Unto whom I swear in my wrath etc?—[Only] in my wrath I swear, but repented thereof. R. Joshua b. Karha said: This verse was spoken only in reference to future generations. [Thus:] Gather my saints together unto me—this refers to the righteous of every generation; that have made a covenant with me—to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who submitted to the fiery furnace; by sacrifice—to R. Akiba and his companions, who gave themselves up to immolation for the sake of the Torah.⁽⁶⁾ R. Simeon b. Manasya said: **They will enter the future world,** as it is said, And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs.⁽⁷⁾ Rabbah b. Bar Hana said in R. Johanan's name: [Here] R. Akiba abandoned his love.⁽⁸⁾ For it is written, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord: I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown;⁽⁹⁾ if others will enter [the future world] in their merit, surely they themselves most certainly will!

(2) Num. XIV, 35.

(3) Ps. XCV, 10f.

(4) Ibid. I, 5. This description fits the generation of the wilderness. Cf. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord . . . And Moses took the blood (thereof), and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. (Ex. XXIV, 5, 8).

- (5) Lit., 'fulfil.'
- (6) R. Akiba disobeyed the Roman edict forbidding the practice and teaching of religion and was martyred in consequence—Ber. 61b. He was executed after several years of imprisonment (supra 12a) about the year 132 C.E.
- (7) Isa. XXXV, 10: he regards 'the ransomed of the Lord' as alluding to those who left Egypt, whom the Lord 'ransomed.'
- (8) In his love for Israel he generally sought the happiest destinies for them. Here, however, he taught that the generation of the wilderness had no portion in the world to come, though, as the speaker proceeds to demonstrate, he could so have interpreted a verse as to grant them a share therein.
- (9) Jer. II, 2: thus ... this act of faith on the part of the generation of the wilderness stood their descendants in good stead and conferred the privilege upon them of a share in the future world.

We now begin to sense the full symbolic drama of the making of the Tabernacle. In the wilderness, long before they crossed the Jordan and entered the promised land, God told the Israelites to build a miniature universe. It would be a place of carefully calibrated order—as the universe is a place of carefully calibrated order. Nowadays, scientists call this the “anthropic principle”—**the finding that the laws of physics and chemistry are finely tuned for the emergence of life.**⁽¹⁰⁾ Just so, did the Tabernacle have to be exact in its construction and dimensions.

The building of the Tabernacle was a symbolic prototype of the building of a society. Just as it was an earthly home for the Divine Presence, so would society become if the Israelites honoured God's laws. The ultimate end of such a society is the harmony of existence that we have not yet experienced, living as we do in a world of work and striving, conflict and competition.

7. Isaiah 11:1-9

⁶**The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them ...** ⁹They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for **the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.**

a. Micah 4:1-4

²**Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.** ³He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. **Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.** ⁴**Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig**

tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

God, however, wanted us to know what we were aiming for, **so that we would not lose our way in the Wilderness of time.** That is why, when it came to the human execution of the building, the Sabbath came first, even though in global terms, the messianic age, the “Sabbath of history,” will come last. God “made known the end at the beginning” (Isa 46:10)—the fulfilled rest that follows creative labour; the peace that will one day take the place of strife—so that we would catch a glimpse of the destination before beginning the journey.

Only those who know where they are travelling to will get there, however fast or slow they go.

- (1) *Shabbat* 49b; see Rashi, commentary to Exodus 3:13, 35:2.
- (2) See essay “The Home We Make for God,” p. 199.
- (3) For more on this, see A.J. Heschel's “*The Sabbath*” (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983).
- (4) *Shabbat* 69b.
- (5) The phrase coes from the prayer *Barukh She'amar*, in the morning service.
- (6) One classical example is the failure of the welfare policies of the 1960s in America and Britain to reduce poverty. By the 1980s it was higher than before. See Charles Murray, *Losing Ground* (Basic Books, 1988).
- (7) Friedrich Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- (8) This was the view of Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).
- (9) *Megilla* 10b; *Vayikra Rabba* 11:7.
- (10) See John Burrow, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford University Press, 1988); Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma* (Allen Lane, 2006); Martin Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (Phoenix, 2000). **See also Robert R. Gorelik, *Creation, Reconciling Genesis and the Big Bang*, (Eshav Books), Chapter 9. The Universe as a Fit Habitat, pp. 74-78 and Chapter 10. Earth—The Cradle of Life, pp. 79-83.**