



Parashat Vayakhel

The portions of Vayakhel and Pekudei record the construction of the *Mishkan* and its various furnishings, in accordance with the specifications outlined in the portions of Teruma and Tetzaveh. A Talmudic tradition teaches that the thirty-nine basic categories of forbidden activity on Shabbat are modeled after the thirty-nine areas of activity required in the process of constructing the *Mishkan* and its appurtenances. As anyone who has ever studied Masekhet Shabbat knows, the Talmud makes a point of finding the source of each *melakha* (area of forbidden activity on Shabbat) within the process of the *Mishkan*'s construction.

The eleventh chapter of Masekhet Shabbat is entitled *Ha-zoreik*, or "One Who Throws," and it addresses the prohibition against throwing objects on Shabbat within the public domain. The underlying assumption of this *halakha* is that throwing is halakhically equivalent to carrying: just as one may not carry on Shabbat within the public domain, so does the Torah forbid throwing. The Talmud (Shabbat 96b) concludes that the prohibition against throwing or transporting in the public domain comes to us through oral tradition, but initially it explores the possibility of a precedent to this *halakha* in the construction of the *Mishkan*. The Gemara suggests that the artisans may have tossed equipment or materials to one another as needed during their work, thus establishing the basis for the prohibition against throwing in a public domain. But the Gemara then rejects this possibility, based on a verse from Parashat Vayakhel. The Torah tells that the artisans came to inform Moshe that the solicited donations exceeded the requirements for the work, and the verse states that the artisans came "*ish ish mi-melakhto asher heima osim*" – "each one from his work, that they were doing" (Shemot 36:4). According to the Gemara, the Torah here emphasizes that each artisan worked in his independent, self-sufficient work station; no artisan had any involvement in the projects assigned to his fellows or even in the supplies of other workers, and hence they would have no reason to pass materials to one another over the course of their activity.

In explaining why the construction site was designed in this manner, Rabbi Moshe Leib Shachor (20th century, Israel), in his Torah commentary *Avnei Shoham*, enlists a comment by Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:45). There Maimonides addresses the law mentioned in the Talmud (Masekhet Arakhin 11b), which he himself discusses in *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Kelei Ha-mikdash 3:9-11), that "those that ministered in the Temple were strictly prohibited interfere with each other's work." The *Levi'im* were divided into different groups with specifically designated tasks, and the members of each group were forbidden from getting involved in the tasks assigned to the others. Likewise, the *Levi'im* were enjoined not to participate in the rites reserved for the *kohanim*, and vice-versa. Maimonides explains, "For if in public duties and offices, each one would not have assigned to him his particular task, general carelessness and neglect would soon be noticed." It was necessary for each *kohen* and *Levi* to focus exclusively on his specific duties so as to avoid mismanagement and laxity in the Temple service.

Presumably, Rabbi Shachor suggests, this same concern arose when preparing to construct the *Mishkan* and fashion its various furnishings. Here, too, it was necessary for each artisan to remain focused on his responsibilities and not neglect his duties by involving himself in somebody else's work. For this reason, he speculates, the worksite was arranged in such a manner that each artisan was equipped with all the materials he

needed, such that he would not so much as have to share any equipment with his fellow workers, thus enabling him to fully concentrate on his own assigned projects.

The service in the Temple is often seen as a model of *avodat Hashem* that must be followed – albeit in less intensive fashion – even outside the sacred precinct of the *Mikdash*. In general life, too, it is necessary for each individual to recognize his personal tasks and duties, and focus his attention on fulfilling his own responsibilities rather than attempting to usurp the roles assigned to others. God has equipped each individual with the full range of "materials" he needs to fulfill his role. A person should feel content with his assigned task and the resources given to him to carry out that task, and not feel envious of the "materials" and roles assigned to his peers.