

PARASHAT VAYAKHEL

SHMUEL RABINOWITZ

How to rekindle dormant love?

Parashat *Vayakhel* describes the creation of the *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle, the temporary temple that accompanied the Jewish nation on its desert journey) and the utensils within it.

The last utensil described is the copper washstand situated in the *Mishkan's* courtyard. This was the sink in which Aaron and his sons, the *kohanim* (priests), as well as the *kohanim* who followed them, washed their hands and feet and purified themselves as preparation for their service of God in the *Mishkan*.

Interestingly, the Torah mentions not only the material from which the washstand was made – copper – but also the source of the material: “And he made the washstand of copper and its base of copper from the mirrors of the women who had set up the legions, who congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (Exodus 38:8).

Based on this description, the washstand was made of copper as shiny as the mirrors used by the women to beautify themselves for their husbands.

Rashi, according to the midrash (*Tanhuma, Pekudei* 9), explains that the contribution of the women led to an argument between Moses and God. Moses initially refused to accept the donation. He felt it was inappropriate to use mirrors meant for such an earthly need as feminine self-adornment as material for creation of a *Mishkan* utensil.

But God answered with an incredible response: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, ‘Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything, because through them the women set up

many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt.’ When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labor, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, ‘I am more beautiful than you.’ And in this way, they aroused their husbands’ desire and would copulate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: ‘Under the apple tree I aroused you’ (Song of Songs 8:5).”

The women wisely awakened the love of their partners and thus built the Jewish nation.

But how did they do so with the use of a mirror?

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (founder and first rebbe of Chabad, 1745-1812) reveals a wonderful secret in his book *Tanya*:

“There is yet another good way for a man, which is suitable for all and very nigh, indeed, to arouse and kindle the light of the love that is implanted and concealed in his heart, that it may shine forth with its intense light, like a burning fire, in the consciousness of the heart and mind.... This [way] is: to take to heart the meaning of the verse ‘As in water, face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.’”

This means that as [in the case of] the likeness and features of the face which a man presents to the water, the same identical face is reflected back to him from the water, so indeed is also the heart of a man who is loyal in his affection for another person, for this love awakens a loving response for him in the heart of his

friend also, cementing their mutual love and loyalty for each other, especially as each sees his friend’s love for him” (*Likutei Amarim* 46)

The Jewish women saw their partners collapsing from the burden of hard labor in Egypt. They would come home and fall into bed exhausted. In their wisdom, the women understood that the way to rekindle love was by looking into a mirror together. When the husband looked into the mirror and saw his wife’s loving glance, his old love was rekindled.

The waters of the washstand served the same purpose. A man looking into the water would see his own image. “As in water, face answers to face.” That same shared look of the husband and wife at their image reflected back at them rekindles their love and creates peace between them.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (Poland, 1765-1827) raises another question: Why does it say “As in water, face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man” and not “as in a mirror”?

And he explains: In order to see one’s face in water, you must bend down, while to look in a mirror, one stands upright.

In order to arouse love, it is not enough to have a loving look that comes from a position of firmness or arrogance. Only when a person looks at another with humility, concession and acceptance, then, “as water, face answers to face,” love is rekindled also by the other side. ■

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DAVID WOLPE

Creating unity...

... in fractious times

It has been a fractious time. The Israelites leaving Egypt complain. The Israelites at Sinai build a golden calf. Moses is angry and anguished. What ought one to do?

The question is of more than academic interest. We live in such times. The particulars differ, but the sense of division is deep and seemingly grows each day. People are inclined to blame politics, but political life is not separate from the way we feel and speak about one another. Social media amplifies the divide and exacerbates it.

For all the wonders of the modern world, we are the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, having witnessed miracles that nonetheless do more to pull us apart than bring us together.

One way of creating unity is through enmity. Leaders know that they can bring their nations together if they identify another nation that threatens

them, whether it is true or not. An enemy within, an enemy that threatens your border, an enemy that opposes your vital interests – all the varieties of antagonism are wielded by leaders to unite an otherwise divided nation. One solution is the way of war.

In our parasha however, for the very first time, Moses calls the people together. He does not do so in the face of Amalek or another enemy. War is not Moses’s method of unity. Rather he calls upon all of Israel and starts to tell them of Shabbat and of donating to the Tabernacle.

These two themes have the power to change the moment.

Shabbat can help bring us together because Shabbat is the holiday where material gives way to spirit. Yes, it is true that we put aside special food for Shabbat and bring out a white tablecloth. We do not become non-physical creatures. But everyone, from the most renowned to the least of Israel, is royalty on this day, prays the same prayers and

has a moment of soul peace.

Everyone listens to the same Torah reading and is free to learn the same lessons. When we sit together in a congregation, tallitot disguise who is wearing a fancy suit and who is dressed in old clothes, and voices raised together make no distinction between stations of life. We are *Clal Yisrael* – the people of Israel, standing before God on a day of calm.

The second theme of donating to the Tabernacle is a reminder that there are differences, but everyone is able to contribute something. Remember that God told the Israelites everyone whose heart moves them could contribute – not everyone who is rich, but everyone who is generous. It is a reminder that we all have something to give to one another and we all have something to learn from one another. Together, we build the means to connect to God.

Those of us who are troubled by the disunity in the Jewish community may take some comfort from our history. This

is not the first time there have been fights and fractures, from Korah until today.

Yet here we have Moses calling the people together and reminding them – we have Shabbat, we have a tabernacle. There are ideas and entities that will enable us to embrace one another with all of our differences.

The seventh day is given each week to reflect on the goodness of God’s world and the collective mission of the Jewish people. The *tzedakah* box stands during the rest of the week to help us build God’s presence in goodness in an unredeemed world.

It was not easy in the time of Moses and it has not grown easier in our own day. But we are still responsible for one another and we still have to hold hands on our way through the wilderness. ■

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JUDAISM 3.0
GOL KALEV

‘We are what the ghetto made us’

European and Egyptian influences determine the state of Judaism – then and now

A not-so-obvious theme of the Bible is the extreme power the surrounding environment has on a nation.

So much so that the Hebrews go into 40 years of quarantine in the desert, which blocks any external influence from trickling in. There, left to their own devices and with zero exposure to the outside, the Hebrews shape their authentic true character, centered around the receiving of the Torah.

This episode of insularity was in between two periods of corrupting influences. The Hebrews were subjected to Egyptian pagan influences, and God makes clear that once they arrived in Canaan, they would be subjected to Canaanite pagan influences.

Hence God instructs the Hebrews to take an extreme preventative measure: The elimination of the Canaanites. This cruel and hard-to-digest order is repeated a number of times. God even delineates a path that such corrupting influences will take: the Canaanite women will tempt the Hebrew men, who will then bow to their idols.

Indeed, such a sequence occurred even before the Hebrews arrived in Canaan. In their 39th year in the desert, after years of apparent insularity, the Hebrews get exposed to the Moabite women, who seduce them and invite them to bow to their idols.

Upon arrival in Canaan, the Hebrews do not eliminate the Canaanites and indeed a primary theme of the biblical narrative from there on is the internal battle between full devotion to God vs worship of surrounding idols that were built “on top of every high hill and below any fresh tree.”

While in Egypt, Moab and Canaan, the Hebrews were influenced by the outside environment. When the Hebrews were expelled from Judea, mostly to Europe, a possible miracle occurred. The Europeans insisted on keeping the Jewish refugees confined and insular. For centuries of persecution, Europeans restricted the Jews’ areas of residence, type of employment and degree of interaction they were allowed with the outside.

Hence the Europeans gifted the Hebrews what the Hebrews themselves failed to achieve during biblical times. Just like Judaism 1.0 was developed in the insularity of the desert, Judaism 2.0 was developed in the insularity of the ghetto: The rituals, religiosity, customs, and Jewish culture. “We are what the ghetto made us,” Theodor Herzl said.

After 18 centuries of “house-arrest” imposed on the Jews by Europe, in the 19th century, a small portion of the world Jewish population was emancipated and invited out of the ghetto (those in Western Europe). This however was met with fierce objection by Europeans. A new movement engulfed Europe in reaction to such emancipation: antisemitism.

Those two vectors: The European influence on the newly emancipated Jews on the one hand, and antisemitism on the other were put to use by Herzl, who crafted a vision for a more perfect Europe in the Jewish state, and viewed antisemitism as a propelling force that would force those “emancipated” Jews back into their Judaism.



TODAY’S ISRAELIS draw a not-so-imaginary bridge to Wall Street. (htmvaleerio/Flickr)

American influences.

Indeed, by the turn of the 21st century, Israel has essentially switched the dominant outside contributor to its cultural ecosystem from European to American.

This is a logical process: Israel’s early immigrants who shaped the 20th-century Zionist ethos were raised in Europe. Their children, however, were born in Israel, and they have grown up with American cultural influences. The American way of thinking, American pop culture and American capitalism all have had a significant impact on the current generations of Israelis.

The young Israeli’s pursuit to join Israel’s thriving hi-tech industry is also a contributor to such a shift from European to American influences. If in the previous generation the Israeli elite would draw an imaginary bridge in their minds to the libraries of Berlin and the concert halls of Vienna, today’s Israelis draw a not-so-imaginary bridge to Silicon Valley and to Wall Street.

From secular to ‘datlaf’

As European influences in Israel decline, so does the early glorification of secularism. Today’s European “secular religion” is missionary, aggressive and exclusive, e.g. “mono-atheistic,” adapting the concept of the exclusive jealous Lord (*El kana*) to European secularism and atheism.

The receding European influence allows Israeli seculars to embrace religious content and experience that in the previous generations were perceived as social taboos. The Israeli secular is evolving to be a *datlaf* – a Hebrew acronym for “sometimes religious” – on the one hand, he is not on a path of doing *teshuvah* or becoming religious, but on the other, he now consumes religious experiences a la carte that suits him, and he does so without shame – he no longer needs to be “ob-servant at home and secular outside.”

Indeed, unlike in Europe, where religiosity is looked down upon and carries social penalties, in America one can be a successful hi-tech entrepreneur, film producer or hedge-fund manager and still be religious.

Moreover, faith plays a role in the emerging philosophical divide of the 21st century between Europeanism and Americanism (for expansion, see my *Newsweek* article: Europeanism vs Americanism). Politically, strategically and now culturally – Israel and the Zionist ethos is squarely on the side of Americanism in this divide.

The Hebrews are no longer insular as they were during 40 years in the Sinai desert and 2,000 years in the European desert, but the switch of the predominant influencing environment contributes to the rapprochement that secular Israeli Jews have with their faith.

This in turns removes a hurdle to the transformation of Judaism seeded by Herzl: Zionism is the return to Judaism. ■

The writer is author of Judaism 3.0 – Judaism’s transformation to Zionism. For details: Judaism-Zionism.com