

Parshas Vayakhel

This week's Parsha is Vayakhel. The literal translation of Vayakhel is gathering; in this instance, Moshe gathered the Jews after Yom Kippur (after the Eigel and the second Luchos). Moshe instituted hearing Parsha every Shabbos. The laws regarding the implementation of the Mishkan are taught. The Mefharshim explains that the laws around Shabbos are highlighted because the services and the development of the Mishkan are the basis for the 39 Melachos and their derivatives, which we cannot perform on Shabbos. The laws regarding what one cannot perform on Shabbos are determined by the service and development of the Mishkan because our work is defined by holy work and holy service. The work we do during the week ought to be defined by holy work that can be derived from it, not the opposite.

Even though much of the design was stated in the previous Parsheos, it is repeated here and consolidated, but it uses the terms the Jews had made in the past tense. That the culmination of their work is recorded. Repeating the steps is to show that the work and the process matter and are worth repeating. Otherwise, the Torah could have had this Parsha in a few sentences. This is an additional explanation of why the work defines the laws of Shabbos.

As the Rebbes explains, a Jew ought to be defined by what they do. It may be obvious spiritually that we should always be performing Mitzvos and surrounding ourselves with acts of service to Hashem. But what about the mundane and the fact

that we must go to work and make a living?

There is a story told of the Chossid of the Alter Rebbe, who was a bit of a jokester named Reb Shmuel Munkes. He once decided to hang from the entrance of the shul of his Rebbe. When the Alter Rebbe came and saw him hanging there, the Rebbe inquired about his intentions. Reb Shmuel responded that a shoemaker has a shoe hanging outside his shop, a candlestick maker has a candlestick, and all shops have a sign indicating what they sell. Therefore, Reb Shmuel said, it only makes sense for the Rebbe, who makes Chassidim, to have a Chosid hanging outside his "shop." Many points can be derived from this story, but for this Dvar Torah, it applies as follows. You will know what a shoemaker does by the sign he hangs in front of his store. Therefore, as a Jew, what sign do you put outside to represent being a Jew? Furthermore, if you asked the shoemaker to define himself, he likely wouldn't limit himself to just a shoemaker. He is a shoemaker in one aspect of his life; for all else, he may have many other passions or purposes, especially as a Jew.

There is another story in the "Rebbe Mahrash, who asks Ivan, the wagon driver, why he eats, who says it is to live another day to eat more. When Bentzion the Meshares of the Rebbe was asked the same question, he replied he eats to have the strength to serve Hashem" (from Derher Magazine quoted from Igros Kodesh of the Friedeker Rebbe). To work and be defined by that is a restricted existence, to work as a Jew to serve Hashem more is the key.

To be a Jew with a 'sign' that shows your wares and that you are a Jew, you must be in a constant act of that pursuit. This means you can use it in all facets of your life, not just in one limited section.

Furthermore, if a person limits themselves to one job or career, and it defines their very being, they will be a restricted person, even though, as a whole, they are greater than the sum of the parts.

For a Jew, this means that all things need to point to being a Jew, and all parts of our lives must be in the service of being defined by it. We choose not just a physical career or another thing as our external narrative. Much like the mundane and physical acts of the Mishkan, which were still holy even during the week, define the laws of Shabbos, the most sacred day of the week.

So, our entire lives must always be geared toward and in the service of Hashem, even our passions and the parts that create our whole being. This means Hashem, Torah, and Mitzvos define our entire lives, and we are not limited to some physical definition.

Good Shabbos.