

## Parshat Vayakhel: Mirroring Majesty

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Why were the mirrors of the women specifically used for the kiyor (washbasin) in the Mishkan? Why were their donations more beloved by Hashem than all the other contributions made to the Mishkan?

The Sichot Mussar explains that the pure spirit of the women who brought children into the world during the dark exile of Egypt infused the kiyor with a special holiness. The isha sotah (a woman suspected of adultery) was tested by drinking the waters of the kiyor, and if she was found innocent, those very waters created peace between her and her husband. The mirrors teach us the power of Jewish women, who were able to take something so physical and invest it with holiness, purpose, and vision.

Likewise, our mission in this world is to take our desires and physical instincts and utilize them for Hashem. The greater the potential for corruption, the holier it becomes when it is uplifted. That is why the mirrors were so beloved to Hashem. In Shema, the verse says, "V'ahavta et Hashem... b'chol me'odecha" — love Hashem with all your

resources. Rashi explains this to mean with all your money. Our challenge in this world is to take our wealth and elevate it. We must take care not to cheat, steal, or overcharge, and we should give charity, spend our money on mitzvot, and help others. When a person uses his wealth for good, it counterbalances his sins. Similarly, a Jew can make his table an altar for Hashem, creating atonement by sanctifying his meals and eating with holiness.

It wasn't the mirrors themselves, but the mesirat nefesh to build Klal Yisrael that gave them sanctity. The Jewish home is a miniature sanctuary. If we invest all our energies in acquiring external furnishings but fail to bring holiness into our homes, we miss a vital foundation. When a couple takes the physical world and elevates it, raising a family l'shem Shamayim, they demonstrate that the Shechinah rests in their home.

Brilliance and ability do not necessarily produce greatness. Instead, willpower, desire, and self-sacrifice cultivate righteousness and fear of Heaven. When a person goes above and beyond, Hashem shines His light upon him. Betzalel was gifted at a young age with

the wisdom to build the Mishkan, and he carried the mesirat nefesh of his grandfather Chur, who was killed trying to prevent the Jewish people from fashioning the Golden Calf. He also had the merit of his grandmother Miriam, who went beyond the call of duty to save the Jewish people.

We must all ask ourselves, "How far am I willing to go? How much of myself am I investing to build a home for Hashem?" The man fills the home with Torah and mitzvot, while the woman creates the framework that receives them. A mother must imbue her children with love and fear of Hashem. She must stand like an immovable rock, safeguarding the sanctity and purity of her home with the same dedication and self-sacrifice that our foremothers possessed.

The Taam V'daat writes that the kiyor was used as preparation for the service in the Mishkan. The women invested holiness in their mirrors, and this enabled the kohanim to access that same desire for sanctity in the avodah as well.

## Rosh Chodesh Nissan: The Power of Renewal

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

Why was kiddush hachodesh (the sanctification of the new moon) the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people?

The Seforno notes that Hashem gave us the power to determine Rosh Chodesh, in contrast to Shabbat, which is built into creation. It was up to the beit din to accept the witnesses who saw the new moon and then consecrate the month. Rosh Chodesh represents the energy of chiddush (renewal). It signifies rejuvenation, rebirth, and the ability to begin anew. This power was placed in our hands.

Kohelet says, "There is nothing new under the sun." The Midrash explains that the verse refers to things under the sun, but not above. Klal Yisrael are above nature. This means that

a Jew who is connected to Hashem and His abundant goodness has the ability to bring chiddush into his life. By tapping into the wellsprings of Rosh Chodesh, especially in the month of Nissan, and making ourselves a vessel to accept renewal, we can bring freshness and vitality into the rest of the year.

Renewal is something beyond human intellect. We don't always realize on a day-to-day basis that we are changing, but in truth we are given another chance every morning to begin again. Hashem has so much trust in us that He grants us new opportunities each day.

The Chiddushei Harim teaches that the exile in Egypt began because of a lack of chiddush. The Torah says, "Vayakam melech chadash (A new king arose)." The power of hitchadshut — renewing oneself in avodat Hashem — was

taken away by the Egyptians. Therefore, the first step toward redemption was the mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh, which returned the strength of hitchadshut into the hands of Klal Yisrael.

This is the basis for what we read in the Haggadah, "Yachol mei'Rosh Chodesh." Why might we think it possible to begin fulfilling the mitzvah of sipur yetziat Mitzrayim (telling the story of the Exodus) fifteen days earlier? The power of hitchadshut that began on Rosh Chodesh Nissan set the redemption into motion.

King David pleads in Tehilim, "Hashem, take me out of the cage of my soul so that I may thank Your name." Hashem yearns for our connection. When our speech is engaged and

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Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

# אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

Volume 18 Number 3

Brought to you by Naaleh.com

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our soul is restricted, expressing kavod Shamayim (the glory of His name) becomes difficult. This stems from a lack of hitchadshut. The way to leave the cage is by infusing new vitality into our service of Hashem. This is why Rosh Chodesh was the first mitzvah. Just as the moon waxes and wanes, so can we. There are times when we feel full and times when we feel spiritually lacking, but we can gird ourselves with new strength and begin again.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that a Jew

should approach avodat Hashem with freshness, newness, and youthfulness. We must ask Hashem to open our hearts. The world's obsession with newness and staying young is really the soul calling for chiddush and renewed energy in avodat Hashem. We have to trust that we can make a new start — and that the people around us can too.

Hashem gives us the gift of Nissan at a time when the entire world is renewing itself. We say the blessing "Shelo chiseir b'olamo," acknowledging that nothing is lacking in His

world. If we examine nature in all its intricacy, we can learn bitachon. If Hashem created all this for a tree and a dandelion, certainly He can give us everything we need to blossom and grow. This is the secret of the month of Nissan.

Women were given the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh because they embody and empower the world with hitchadshut. We were redeemed in Nissan, and in the merit of righteous women we will be redeemed again.

## Life Cycle: Death Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Life and death are intimately connected. When a child is conceived, his soul enters his body to achieve a mission within a specific span of time. All of the steps along the way enable the person to fulfill his purpose. Death is a consequence of sin. Adam could have lived indefinitely; the fact that he chose to bring evil and concealment into the world is what makes life finite. Adam lived to be 930 years old, but as the world became more corrupted, man's lifespan became shorter. The Great Flood reduced it further. Avraham died at 175, and as time passed it was shortened even more, until David HaMelech wrote in Tehilim, "And what are we but 70 years..." At that point, the human lifespan stopped decreasing.

One of the punishments described in the Torah is kareis — the soul being cut off. There are three types of kareis. The first and most serious is being cut off from what could have been one's portion in Olam HaBa; the person has no relationship to the self he could have become. The second is being cut off from the Jewish people, no longer able to identify with the soul and merit of the nation. The third is being cut off from the ability to live what could have been a full lifespan, with a person dying at a young age of 60, or according to some opinions, 70.

The concept of reincarnation is mentioned frequently in the writings of Kabbalah and in the works of the Gra. If a person does not

complete his mission in his first lifetime, he must return again to this world. Sometimes the amount of time given in a second or third lifetime may be much less, because there is less the soul needs to achieve. One cannot say that someone who dies young must have deserved kareis; in fact, many who died young, such as the Arizal and the Ramchal, accomplished great things.

The Arizal told his students that he would only be able to live among them if there was peace. His ability to teach was contingent on their capacity to learn from him, and the hallmark of spiritual blockage is a lack of peace between people. One Friday, there was a fight in the courtyard and harsh words were exchanged among the wives of his students. The husbands became involved, and within 24 hours the Arizal passed away.

We cannot know who died because of kareis and who did not. However, it is possible for a person to shorten their lifespan through bad choices. A spiritually sensitive person may have an intuitive awareness of the soul beginning to leave the body a month before death.

There was a man who went for an appointment with his oncologist and was told he could undergo painful treatment that might extend his life, or forgo treatment, which would shorten it. He asked Rav Moshe Feinstein what to do. Rav Moshe answered that if he were a football player, he would advise him to

choose the shorter lifespan, because his life would essentially be over without football. But he was a Jew — he could perform mitzvot until the very last moment. Life is about valuing every moment, and so he chose the longer, more difficult course of treatment.

Part of the cycle of life is that it will end. Rav Avigdor Miller speaks about this, explaining that the natural physical decline people experience toward the end of life helps them say goodbye to their physical identity. You are not your hand, face, hair, or figure — you are something more.

I had a dear friend who passed away recently at 97. She always looked dignified and beautiful, but her true identity was her soul. She was an inveterate shiur-goer well into her 90s. On Shavuot night, she loved listening to the all-night shiurim in the Old City, and my friend Sarah Rigler offered to host her afterward. But she insisted on going to the Great Synagogue. She could barely walk, yet she wanted to hear words of Torah from Rav Steinsaltz and Rav Lau, and whatever it took, she would get there. Later, when I visited her, I asked how she managed it. She said, "If you want something, you plan it and you take your time doing it, because that's what time is for." It might have taken her three hours to get to Rechavia, but this was her decision about how she wanted to spend her time. Time is life, and using it to attain eternity is using one's life for what it was meant for.

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