

Parsha Ponders

Vayakhel / Shekalim | February 28, 2019 | 24 Adar I 5779

*Universal labor*¹

ויקהל משה את-כל-עדת בני ישראל ויאמר אלהם אלה הדברים אשר-צוה יקוק לעשת אתם: ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קדש שבת שבתון וגו'

Moshe congregated the assembly of Israel and said to them: "These are the matters to which Hashem commanded, to perform them: Six days your work shall be done, and the seventh day shall be Holy, a *shabbos* of rest..."²

This week's *parsha* begins with a strange combination of verses. First, we are told that what follows are the commands which Hashem expects us to perform. Then, we are warned against performing work on *shabbos*. This is telling us **not** to do something. This anomaly forces us to read the verses in their proper context. This *parsha* details the vessels and materials that went into the creation of the *Mishkan*. What this verse is referring to is that the Jews were adjured to construct the *Mishkan* and all that went into it. However, the verse is followed by another command: to observe *shabbos* properly by refraining from work. We learn from here that the very constructive activities that go into the creation of the *Mishkan* are the forms of creative labor which are forbidden on *shabbos*³.

This understanding by our Sages goes further than expected. Not only are the acts of construction for the *Mishkan* forbidden on *shabbos*, they are the sole criteria for defining what the Torah means by "work". That is, anything that wasn't involved in the creation of the *Mishkan*, is permissible on *shabbos*. Furthermore, acts similar to those involved in the *Mishkan*, if they are lacking the essential characteristics of that particular form of labor, are permitted on a Torah level (although usually forbidden Rabbinically). For example: digging a hole in the ground for agricultural purposes is forbidden, as that is what they did for the *Mishkan*. However, digging a hole to retrieve and use the dirt, is permissible (again, on a Torah level). This begs the question: if the purpose of *shabbos* was to give us a day of rest, why did Hashem make the forbidden labors dependent on what was necessary for the *Mishkan*, regardless of their necessary level of exertion? Why is it **so** dependent that the same act, with the slightest of changes, can change from absolutely forbidden to completely permissible?

It is revealed in many sources, some of them exegetical⁴, some of them more esoteric⁵ and Kabbalistic⁶, that the *Mishkan* wasn't just a portable Temple structure for the Jews' travels in the wilderness. It was a microcosm of the universe, and of all the sub-universes within, both the spiritual and the physical. Its physical structure was aligned with all the aspects of the spiritual and physical universe. Not only that, but Betzalel, the chief architect of the *Mishkan*, used the very acts that went into the creation of the universe to create the *Mishkan*⁷.

What's the essence of the day of rest known as *shabbos*? It's testimony that there's a Creator in this world⁸. The Torah tells us⁹ that He created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. This "rest"

¹ Based on [Be'er Yosef](#) to [Exodus](#) 35:1-2

² [Exodus](#) *loc. cit.*

³ [Mechilta](#) *ad. loc.* See [Ramban](#) and [Malbim](#) *ad. loc.*

⁴ [Shemos Rabbah](#) 33:4; [Midrash Tanchuma](#) *Pekudei* § 2. See also [Megillah](#) 10b

⁵ [Nefesh HaChaim](#) 1:4

⁶ [Rabbeinu Bachaye](#) to [Exodus](#) 25:9; [Shnei Luchos HaBris](#) *Torah Shebiksav Terumah, Vayakhel* and *Pekudei*

⁷ [Berachos](#) 55a

⁸ [Mechilta](#) to [Exodus](#) 20:14

⁹ [Genesis](#) Chapter 1

meant cessation from creative activities. By following suit throughout our lives, by working throughout the week, being involved in creative tasks, and resting on the seventh day, we are mimicking our Creator. By doing so we are demonstrating our belief that Hashem created the universe.

If so, Hashem wants us to rest from the very creative activities that He used to create the universe. Only then will there be proper testimony through observing *shabbos*. However, how could we ever know which creative acts were used to create and form the universe? We learn it from the *Mishkan*. Its form and structure are a microcosm of the universe, and it was constructed the same way as the universe. By studying and observing the creative labor that went into the *Mishkan*, we can deduce how to properly observe *shabbos*. Doing so will testify to all that there is a Creator, who rested on the seventh day.

Good Shabbos