

Parsha Ponders

Vayakhel / Shekalim | February 25, 2022 | 25 Adar I 5782

Careful word choice¹

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 ליקוק וגו' ויאמר משה אל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל לאמר **זה הדבר** אשר-צוה יקוק לאמר: קחו מאתכם **תרומה** ליקוק וגו'

Moshe **congregated** the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, and said to them: “**These are the matters** which Hashem commanded you, to perform them. Six days work shall be done and on the seventh day it shall be Holy, a restful **Shabbos** for Hashem...” Moshe said to the entire assembly of the children of Israel, saying: “**This is the matter** which Hashem commanded, saying: ‘Take from yourselves a **donation** for Hashem...”²

The beginning of this week’s *parsha* contains many oddities and inconsistencies. First, we are told that Moshe congregated the entire Jewish people to tell them about the observance of Shabbos. Why was there a need to teach them about Shabbos? This isn’t the first time they’ve heard about it. In fact, it was already repeated in last week’s *parsha*! What’s being added this time around? Furthermore, why is it stressed that Moshe congregated them? We don’t find this action associated with *any* other *mitzvah* in the Torah.

After mentioning the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, Moshe proceeds to reiterate to the Jewish people the materials needed for the construction of the *Mishkan*. This was the moment that people were expected to make whatever donations they wanted. The Torah then proceeds to elaborate on the collection of these materials and their respective modification and construction into Temple vessels and clothing. Since this is the focus of the *parsha*, why is it preceded with the *mitzvah* of Shabbos?

What’s also strange is the *mitzvah* of Shabbos is described as “these are the matters”, in plural, whereas the *mitzvos* involved in the creation of the *Mishkan* are described as “this is the matter”, in the singular. Not only is this inconsistent, it’s seemingly backwards. Only one detail is given regarding the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. In contrast, dozens and dozens of details are provided regarding the *Mishkan*. How can we make sense of all of these questions?

What was the impetus for the creation of the *Mishkan*? We are taught³ that it was to serve as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Jews sinned with idolatry, and a portable Temple to serve G-d alone would be there to rectify their mistake. We find that during the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people congregated together to demand Aharon make for them a god. To atone for this mistake, Moshe specifically congregated the people together to construct the *Mishkan*⁴.

In fact, we find that this was a pattern of Moshe. In the past, he sinned with the word אָ. When he first went to Pharaoh, at Hashem’s command, to demand the Jewish people’s release from slavery, Pharaoh made their burden that much harder. Moshe complained to Hashem by saying that מָא (since) I came to

¹ Based on [Imrei Shefer](#) to [Exodus](#) Chapter 35 § 1, 2, by [Rav Shlomo Kluger](#). [Rav Shlomo Kluger](#) was an extremely prolific writer, having written over a hundred *sefarim*. His novella on the *parsha* have been compiled into almost fifty volumes called [Chochmas HaTorah](#), with separate volumes for each *parsha*. This one appears on p. 13

² Exodus 35:1,2, 4

³ [Sifrei Devarim](#) § 1; [Shemos Rabbah](#) 51:8; [Midrash Lekach Tov parshas Vayakhel](#) (beginning); [Rabbeinu Bachaye](#) to [Exodus](#) 25:6. See also [Rashi](#) to [ibid](#) 31:8

⁴ Subsequent to reading this [Imrei Shefer](#) I realized that the [Midrash Lekach Tov](#) already said this idea

Pharaoh, things have gotten worse. You haven't saved the people, rather You made it worse⁵. To atone for this inappropriate behavior, Moshe began his song of praise for the splitting of the sea with the word **אֵל** יִשְׂרָאֵל. He atoned for his past behavior by repeating it for the good⁶. The same intent was behind his congregating the nation.

Further analysis of the sin of the Golden Calf reveals more examples of this phenomenon. When the Golden Calf was created, the people declared: **אלה אלהיך ישראל**, Jewish people! *These are your gods*⁷. To atone for this sin, when Moshe introduced the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, he told the people, "*these are the matters*"⁸. We find a different version of the events. Another verse has the Jewish people saying: **זה אלהיך**, *this is your god*⁹. To atone for this sin, Moshe introduced the instructions for the *Mishkan* with "*this is the matter*". Again, we see Moshe was very precise with his word choice.

Are these two accounts regarding the Golden Calf contradictory? Not necessarily. They're describing the two types of sinners at that time. Some only considered the Golden Calf to be a partner with G-d, Heaven forbid. They didn't abandon G-d, and as such they referred to their deity in the plural. "These are your gods", meaning, the Golden Calf, and Hashem Himself. Others went with full-blown idol worship and abandoned G-d completely. They were the ones who said, "this is your god". This makes sense, but can we glean an understanding for why Moshe paired for those who partnered an idol with G-d with the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, and those who abandoned G-d with the *mitzvos* of the *Mishkan*?

The Jewish people knew that the *Mishkan* was meant to serve as an atonement for their sin with the Golden Calf. However, they were concerned that Hashem wouldn't forgive them. Their sin was too heinous a crime, and perhaps their work would be for naught. To alleviate their concerns, Hashem preceded the construction of the *Mishkan* by reminding them of the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. Our Sages teach us¹⁰ that anyone who observes Shabbos properly, even if they serve idols like in the generation of Enosh¹¹, they will be completely forgiven. By reminding them of the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, Moshe was guaranteeing them atonement. Either through the *mitzvah* of Shabbos, or through the *Mishkan*.

Why do our Sages stress *like in the generation of Enosh*? Well, we know that in that early stage in history, they didn't completely abandon Hashem. They merely added on idols to Hashem, and began to serve other things as well. It now makes perfect sense why Moshe said, "these are the matters" specifically with the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. This was to atone for those who added on the Golden Calf to Hashem, but didn't abandon Him completely. For this type of sin, Shabbos can atone. For those who completely abandoned Hashem, they would have to rely on the atonement provided by the *Mishkan*¹².

⁵ Exodus 5:23

⁶ Shemos Rabbah 23:3

⁷ Exodus 32:4

⁸ This also appears in Midrash Lekach Tov *loc. cit.*, although Rav Shlomo Kluger presumably didn't see it. Shemos Rabbah 51:8 says a similar idea, but compares the **אלה אלהיך** to **אלה פקודי המשכן** (Exodus 38:21)

⁹ Nehemiah 9:18

¹⁰ Shabbos 118b

¹¹ Genesis 5:26 with Rashi, based on Bereishis Rabbah 23:7

¹² I heard this last part from Rav Daniel Glatstein in a *shiur* available at <https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=179928>. It sounded like he was saying this from the Imrei Shefer, but I didn't find it. Perhaps this was his own addition to explain the *sefer*