

# kol chovevei TORAH

PARSHA PONDERINGS

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## Kol Chovevei

**Torah** is a publication of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. YCT's mission is to professionally train open Orthodox rabbis who will lead the Jewish community and shape its spiritual and intellectual character in consonance with modern and open Orthodox values and commitments.

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## Getting our Sacred Priorities in Order

By Rabbi Yonah Berman, YCT '07

As we read the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel, we find ourselves in the midst of much activity in the Israelite camp next to Mt. Sinai. The Children of Israel are about to begin building the Tabernacle, a point of constant connection with God, which will serve them until a permanent temple can be established in the Land of Israel. The nation is asked to donate various building materials, and artisans are assigned tasks under the leadership of Moshe and Betzalel, assuring that everything is done in accordance with God's instructions.

It therefore seems strange that the first three verses of our parsha do not even mention the Tabernacle or its construction, but are instead a reminder of the importance of Shabbat:

*And Moses assembled all the congregation of the Children of Israel, and said to them: "These are the words which the Lord has commanded, that you should do them."*

*Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a Sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whosoever does any work therein shall be put to death."*

*"You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day."*

The rabbis of the Talmud used these verses' placement to infer the 39 *Avot Melachah* – categories of labor which one may not perform on Shabbat. In effect, if an act was done as part of the construction of the Tabernacle, then it became permanently forbidden on Shabbat. For example, since the priestly vestments which were to be worn in the Temple were woven, it is forbidden to weave material on Shabbat.

It has also been suggested that the first verses of our parsha function as a reminder to the people constructing the Tabernacle that they must suspend their work every week at the onset of Shabbat. The Children of Israel could have assumed that this project, with its lofty goal of providing a "dwelling place" for God, would have trumped Shabbat observance. By

mentioning Shabbat before describing the Tabernacle's construction, the Torah reminds us of the universal importance of keeping Shabbat, even if there are other important pursuits underway.

In order to understand why Shabbat is so important, one must appreciate that Shabbat and the Tabernacle both represent different types of *Kedushah* - sanctity. On one hand, the Tabernacle represents a prime example of *Kedushat Makom* – the sanctity of a certain space. Contrastingly, Shabbat typifies the notion of *Kedushat Zman* – the sanctity of a specified time.

Perhaps the Torah is trying to teach that sanctity of a given time is more important than the sanctity associated with a given space (or with its construction, as in our parsha). This may be due to the reality that sacred space can be violated and destroyed in a way which sacred time cannot. We no longer have the Tabernacle, nor are we free to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and worship God in it. However, sacred time remains – Shabbat will take place every single week, no matter what one's life circumstances may be.

Rav Yehudah Amital speaks of how during the *Shoah*, he was sent to a forced-labor camp, where it was clearly impossible for him to properly keep all the laws and customs of Shabbat. He would therefore attempt to change his shirt to a slightly cleaner one on Friday afternoon before sundown, while whispering the word "*Shabbos*" to himself. In so doing, he would concentrate all of a day's worth of Shabbat observance into one act. Although Rav Amital did not have control over his physical surroundings, he managed to find a way to connect with, and observe Shabbat under highly difficult circumstances.

May we be blessed with many opportunities to connect with God and with those around us under all of life's circumstances, in sacred spaces and in sacred times.

**This D'var Torah is dedicated to Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, as we mark his 1000th day in captivity this Shabbat. We pray that Gilad be released from the bonds of physical imprisonment and returned to his family without delay.**

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