

21.

VAYAKEL 1981

In the Torah portion Vayakel we have mentioned the Sabbath. There are two aspects to the Sabbath. One where we remember the creation of the world and we speak of G-d as the creator. The other aspect of the Sabbath is we talk about remembering the Exodus from Egypt. We speak about G-d as the G-d of providence. G-d has acted in human affairs. In past generations the concept of G-d the creator has come under challenge. Now the concept of G-d as a force still active in human affairs is being called into question. In order for us to believe in objective morality we must believe that G-d is still active in human affairs. Many of the social sciences today are trying to undermine this belief.

VAYAKHEL - PEKUDE 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portions Vayakhel-Pekude we have recounted how the Tabernacle was finished. We learn how afterwards the cloud covered the Tabernacle and the glory of G-d filled the Mishkan. G-d's presence could be felt by everyone. It is interesting to note that this book of Exodus, Shmos, is known as Sefer Haga'ula, the book of the redemption. It, of course, deals with the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt and it also deals with the building of the Mishkan. In fact, if we were to deal with the number of verses there are probably more verses to do with the building of the Mishkan than the redemption from Egypt itself. This is a little hard to understand. What's more, interspersed throughout the reciting of the details of the building of the Mishkan are the laws of the Sabbath. In fact, the very opening of the Torah portion, Vayakhel, teaches us that we are not to create fire on Sabbath. We can use one already in existence, but we cannot create fire. Why should it be that the glory of G-d did not descend upon the Jewish people until after they had built the Mishkan? After all, wasn't the Exodus from Egypt the greater event? What did the completion of the Mishkan have to do with G-d's glory descending and why is the whole book of Shmos called the book of redemption when only the first part deals with the redemption from Egypt? It seems to me that we are being told something very important here. This is indicated by the use of the word Vayakhel. The word Vayakhel^{chil} is used when we refer to something which is finished but not completed. In the very beginning when G-d created the world it said, "Vayakhel^{chil}, He finished the world", but it was not completed. We are given the job of completing the world. It is very easy to start things. It is harder to finish them, and it is the most difficult to maintain them, to complete them. So many people who have started buildings have even finished them, but then they let them run down. They do not maintain them. There are many people who start things but do not know how to maintain things. This is especially true in relationships. They just cannot maintain them. There are many people who know how to start things and know how to finish them, but are very poor administrators. There are many synagogues in the United States which are falling apart because people do not know how to maintain them. In life it is very important that we know how to maintain relationships, that we know how to nurture them and let them grow. Some women are accused of not being creative because they stay home

and raise a family. Here they have children and are nurturing them and letting them grow. What could be more creative than that? G-d's glory could not come down on the Jewish people until they learned how to maintain their relationship with G-d. The Rabbis say that they were not allowed to build the Mishkan on Shabbos because Shabbos is a day where we maintain what we have, where we learn how to complete what we have finished. Our use of fire is limited on Shabbos to teach us that the highest form of creativity, the highest form of human achievement is not in creating but in maintaining. G-d's glory did not come upon the Mishkan until it was actually in use. The Mishkan was finished actually around Chanukah time in the month of Kislev. It was not dedicated and used until Nissan. Only then did G-d's glory descend. G-d's glory did not descend upon the Jewish people in full force when they left Egypt, only when they learned how to maintain their relationships. The story about the man who came into an antique shop and asked how much an item was. He was told it was \$450. He came back the next week and asked how much the same item was. He was told it was \$500. He asked why and the owner said, "Don't you realize how much labor and materials have gone up?". We, too, have sacrificed permanent values for the restless pursuits after new starts. It is not as important starting as it is to learn how to maintain and deepen what you have.

VAYAKHEL 1984
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Vayakhel we learn all about the construction of the Tabernacle. Before we learn about how the Tabernacle was all put together and how Moshe Rabbeinu took donations for it, we learn about the Shabbos. This, of course, was to teach us that the Mishkan could not be built on Shabbos. Creativity has its limits. It is strange, though, that when G-d first commanded Moshe about the Tabernacle He first told him about how they were to build the Tabernacle and only afterwards did He tell him about the Shabbos. Here, when Moshe gathers together the people he first tells them about the Shabbos and only afterwards about building the Tabernacle. What's more, the Rabbis learn a very interesting Halacha from the sentence which says "You shall not burn fire in all your habitations on Shabbos." They learn from this passage that no punishment is to be meted out on the Shabbos. How could they derive this Halacha from these words? It seems to me that the answer to these questions lie in the timing of G-d speaking to Moshe and Moshe speaking to the people. When G-d spoke to Moshe He had talked to him before the sin of the golden calf. Moshe was talking to the Jewish people after the sin of the golden calf. What was the sin of the golden calf? The main sin of the solden calf was that the people worshipped the work of their own hands. They thought that creativity was everything. They failed to realize that even their creativity was limited. There are certain experiments we cannot do because they will harm human beings. What's more, even whether or not we can use our talents is limited. You might be born the greatest violinist in the world, but if you were born 2000 years ago you would not play because the violin was not invented yet. You might have been the greatest auto racer, but if you were born 300 years ago you never would have had a chance to use that talent. You might be the greatest space drive, but today you cannot use this talent. If you were born 50 years ago with great computer skills you would not have been able to use these skills until very recently. Even in sports Earl Campbell could not have been a great fullback or halfback because football was not invented. Then he would have to kick the ball, not carry it. Many times we find that people worship the creation of their hands. I remember how a few years ago there were

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several terrorist attacks in Israel and people were killed. Israel retaliated by destroying 100 planes in Beirut. People were up in arms, not because people were killed, but because millions of dollars worth of property was destroyed. People worship the creation of their hands. I remember, too, being called by a very old woman who was very upset because she had almost no contact with her family. Nobody wanted to come and see her. I went there and I found that she not only had a cover over her furniture, but she had a plastic cover over that and a newspaper on top of the plastic cover. What's more, she told me she never allowed her grandchildren to sit in the living room or dining room. She also had a beautiful garden, but would allow no one to play ball in it. I did not have the heart to tell her she was worshipping her things instead of establishing relationships with her family. I did sit on her chair which I think made her mad because she never called me again. We find sometimes that people worship the creation of their own hands. That's why when Moshe told the Jewish people about the Tabernacle he first prefaced it by telling them about the Shabbos. People, relationships are much more important than things, even the creation of our own hands. G-d told Moshe first about the Tabernacle and only about the Shabbos afterwards, because the people had no yet sinned with the golden calf. They had not yet worshipped the creation of their own hands, and perhaps they would not, but Moshe knew they would and, therefore, he told them about the Shabbos first. That's, too, why we learn from this passage that we are not to punish anyone on this day. It is a day for establishing relationships, even with people who are unworthy and have done terrible things. Too often in our day all people are interested in is the creation of their own hands and not people. I am reminded of the story of the man who, upon his retirement, was given a dinner. At the dinner someone stood up and said, "This man, Mr. Jones, does not know the meaning of the word dissembling. Mr. Jones does not know the meaning of the word quit. He does not know the meaning of the words to be late. He does not know the meaning of the word failure. Therefore, we have all pitched in together to buy him a dictionary." Unfortunately, in life today too many people do not know what really counts. It is relationships, not things.

VAYAKHEL 1985
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we took out two Torahs because today is also Parshas Parah. We read about the special ceremony that was performed when the Temple stood to purify people who were ritually impure. Ritual impurity did not have anything to do with committing a sin. Ritual impurity had to do with things that make a person psychologically depressed, liked taking care of the dead. Caring for the dead, of course, is a great Mitzvah. The High Priest on his way to perform the Yom Kippur services, if he found an unattended dead body, was told that he must stop and take care of this body even though he would by so doing become ritually impure and become ineligible to conduct the Yom Kippur services. People who were ritually impure had to become pure before they could enter the Temple. There was something strange, though, about this ceremony. Everybody who prepared the ashes of the red cow, which were used in the sprinkling, became themselves impure while those who were ritually unclean and were sprinkled by these ashes became pure. This seems very strange that those who prepared the mixture became unclean while those who were sprinkled with it became clean. Perhaps we can understand this by what we learn in our Torah portion Vayakhel. In the Torah portion Vayakhel we learn about the construction of the Tabernacle and all the objects in it, how the people contributed for it, and how each part of the Mishkan was made. The Torah portion starts out by telling us about Shabbos and then it goes into the details of the building of the Mishkan. Originally, when G-d told Moshe to build the Tabernacle, He told him first about all the details of the Tabernacle and then about the Shabbos. Why did Moshe reverse the order? Why when G-d told him about the building of the Tabernacle He put the building first and the Shabbos second, but when Moshe told the people he put the Shabbos first and the building of the Mishkan second. The rabbis tell us that something very significant occurred between the time when Moshe received the commandment from G-d to build the Tabernacle and the time when Moshe communicated this commandment to the Jewish people. The people in the interim had sinned by worshipping the golden calf. They had committed a terrible sin. What was their sin? They worshipped the works of their own hands. Today we find people performing this same sin. They worship their own abilities. They worship their own talents, the works of their own hands. If they are a businessman

or a professional they consider their business or profession the highest value. They are willing to sacrifice their family and friends and even morality for the sake of success or developing their own talents. This is worshipping the works of your own hands. It is true it is important that we develop our own talents, and it is important that we be creative, but not at the sacrifice of our family or friends or of being immoral. That's what the Shabbos teaches us. Shabbos teaches us that we are not only man the creator, but man the appreciator and mediator. We not only must create, but we must relate. In the beginning before the people had sinned with the golden calf G-d stressed man's creative ability, and then He put down the laws of the Shabbos to teach us that we must learn to relate. When Moshe relayed the laws to the people, after the sin of the golden calf, he knew that he had to stress the fact that man had to learn to relate as well as create. We create six days a week. Creation is important, but without learning how to relate we end up worshipping our own creations. This, too, was one of the reasons why the ashes of the red heifer made all who prepared it impure and purified those who were impure. This was not a magic potion. The people who created it had to realize that their creation was not everything. Their creation was not a magical potion which would save the Jewish people alone from ritually impurity. It was only a means to an end, just like all creation is a means to an end so we can better learn how to relate. The people became pure because others sprinkled them. You could not purify yourself. You need others in order to get out of a depression. In life we have to realize how to relate as well as create. Unfortunately, we have only stressed creation in our modern era. Therefore, many people do not develop at all their ability to relate. This Torah portion teaches us that it is wrong to worship the works of our hands. We must never let developing our abilities be our first and primary value. Our first and primary value must be to be people who know how to relate and have moral values. I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who had a fight with her husband. She went home to her mother and said, "Mommy, I decided to teach my husband a lesson. I'm going to live with you." Her mother looked at her

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and said, "Daughter, if you really want to teach your husband a lesson you'll go home and I'll come live with you." The major lessons of life are learning how to relate. Creation is important but so is learning how to relate.

VAYAKHEL-PEKUDE 1988
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the conclusion of the Torah portions Vayakhel-Pekude we conclude the second book of the Bible, the Book of Shmos. The rabbis call the Book of Shmos (Numbers in English) by two names. They call it Shmos, which means "names", and they also called it "Sefer HaGula - the Book of the Redemption". It is hard to understand why the rabbis call this second book of the Bible Sefer HaGula, the Book of Redemption. After all, only the first part of the book talks about the redemption from Egypt while the second half, the greater portion of the book, speaks about the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, how it was constructed, what materials were used to construct it, etc., yet the rabbis insist on calling the whole book Sefer HaGula. Why should this be so? What's more, when we read the Torah portion Pekude it says over and over again that the people did "as G-d had commanded Moshe". Why this repetition? And why also did Moshe Rabbeinu bless the people? It says that "Moshe saw all the work and behold they did it as G-d had commanded so they did, and Moshe blessed them." Rashi and the commentators explain that the blessing that Moshe gave the people was that G-d's presence should be felt in the work of their hands. But why did Moshe have to give this blessing to the Jewish people? After all, G-d, Himself, had given this promise to the Jewish people when He said, "And you make Me a Tabernacle, and I will dwell in their midst." Why, then, did Moshe have to bless the people? Furthermore, we will notice that as we read about the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, that interspersed throughout we learn about Shabbos. What does Shabbos have to do with the construction of the Mishkan?

To my mind, the answer to all these questions can be found in the words that the Torah used in explaining the construction of the Mishkan and the finishing of the constructing of the Mishkan. It says, "Vayakhel Moshe -

and Moshe finished the construction of the Mishkan". It uses the word "Vayakhel". This is a strange word. This is exactly the same word that G-d uses when He finishes creation. It says, "And they were finished the heaven and the earth and all their hosts." What does it mean when we use the word "Vayakhel"? Vayakhel really does not mean "to finish". Vayakhel means "to complete" but not finish. Something can be completed but not finished. That is why it says, "And it was complete all the work of the Tabernacle of the tent of meeting". We use the word complete but not finish. G-d completed the world, but He did not finish it just the same way we can complete the building of a Mishkan, of a Tabernacle, of a shul, but we are not finished. You can have a beautiful structure but if there are no services in there, if there are no study groups in there, if there are no benevolent societies that meet in there like a Chevra Kadisha or Free Loan Society, then the structure is complete, but it is not finished. That is the same thing G-d did when He completed the world. He completed it, but it is not finished. That is why it says, "Lasos - to do" at the very end, because He gave lots for us to do. The world is complete. Everything is here. We just have to learn how to use it in the proper way. All diseases have their proper cures. We just have to look for the cures. That is why we always say G-d created the cure before He created the disease. This is true of every aspect of life. We could think that the world's climates would be so inhospitable to man that we could not live in the world, but we know, because of our ingenuity and scientific skill, that we can invent different things which will allow us to live in all the climates of the earth. The world is complete. Everything is here that we need, but it is not finished.

That was true also of the Mishkan. It was completed but was not finished.

Too often in life we look to create but not to relate. We do not understand that it is not enough to create an object, but we have to relate to it in the proper way. That, of course, is what Shabbos is teaching us. That's why Shabbos is interspersed among the building of the Mishkan, because the Shabbos teaches us that we are to be man the meditator, man the appreciator, that we not only have to create things, but we have to learn how to relate to things. We have to learn how to appreciate them. We have to learn to extend ourselves and how to help others and not just be concerned with creating objects, because man has been granted by G-d. That, of course, was the blessing that G-d gave man, that if you will build the Mishkan, then I will dwell in their midst, that G-d has given man great creative powers, but these creative powers are not enough. We have to learn how to relate these powers to everybody else. We have to learn how to relate ourselves to these powers. That is why it is so important that Moshe also bless the Jewish people. He blessed them that G-d's presence should rest in the work of their hands, not only that they should have the creative ability but they should know how to use this creative ability in a way to better society, in a way to develop themselves spiritually, in a way to make themselves better people. A synagogue can be complete, but it is not finished until there are services there, until there are people working together as a unit, until there is a Sisterhood, a Men's Club, study groups, etc. Something can be complete but not finished.

That is also why we say over and over again that the people did as G-d commanded Moshe, because G-d just does not want us to create. Creation alone without learning how to relate, without learning how to appreciate can be a trap in which we are just greater and greater weapons of destruction instead of learning how to relate to each other, learning how to appreciate

each other, learning how to make a spiritual life that is important. You can the most beautiful house but if the people inside are always fighting and tearing at each other it is not going to do any good. You can have a hovel, but if the people relate to each other in a loving and caring way you can have a wonderful experience. This, too, is very important for us to grasp. It is not things which will help us bring Ge'Ula, redemption, to the world. Both parts of the Book of Shmos deal with redemption. We have to have physical redemption in order to create. A slave has no time. A slave cannot follow truth. A slave cannot have a family. A slave cannot be creative, because a slave must do what his master says. Therefore, the three disabilities of Jewish law that a slave cannot testify because he does not know the truth, and a slave cannot fulfill the commandments that have to do with time because time is not his, and a slave cannot get married. He cannot have a family in the sense that we mean a family. Therefore, G-d tell us, "You want to bring Ge'ula to the world? You want to bring redemption to the world? You want to finish what I complete? Then first be free and learn how to relate. If you can do these things then you can bring Ge'ula to the world."

We today are celebrating the birth of a beautiful baby girl. We thank G-d with all our heart that she is born complete. All her limbs are there. Nothing is missing. She is a healthy normal baby. She is complete, but she is not finished. She can only grow and mature if she learns how to respond and relate to her parents. Her parents, too, grow and her grandparents and friends when they learn how to relate to her. How does a baby mature? By learning how to respond, by imitating her parents and those around her, and if a baby learns the right things then they grow up to be a mentsch. They grow up to want to bring redemption to the world. May little Aviva Yael

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grow up to be such a person. May her parents have much naches and joy from her, and may she, by learning to create and relate, help bring Ge'ula to the world, and may we all work together so that the Ge'ula Shleimal will come.

VAYAKHEL 1992
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Vayakhel and Pekude we learn about the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. In Judaism we have two temples. We have a temple of time and a temple of space. That's why interspersed among the descriptions of how the Tabernacle was built are admonitions of how we are to keep the Sabbath. The things that occupy no space are many times more important than those things which occupy space: love, devotion, dedication, etc. When the Jewish people complete the building of the Tabernacle Moshe blesses them. The rabbis all ask why does Moshe bless them? After all, G-d, Himself, had blessed them earlier when He said, "And they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst". Why did Moshe have to bless them?

The answer can be found perhaps in the word Torah, itself. If we add up the letters of the word Torah they add up to 611. We all know that there are 613 commandments. The rabbis tell us that at Mount Sinai the Jewish people themselves heard the first two commandments. They apprehended G-d when G-d said, "I am the Lord your G-d and you shall have no other gods before Me". We all know that each of us has a piece of G-d in us. Each of us knows that there is more to life than life itself. Each of us knows that we are more than just a physical creature. G-d had promised the Jewish people that if they would build a Tabernacle He would dwell in them. The rabbis tell us that each of us is a temple. Each of our bodies is a sanctuary, that G-d has given us the Torah in order to help us make each of our bodies, themselves, a Tabernacle. However, we have to want to make our bodies a Tabernacle. G-d gave us the Torah, 611 of the commandments, to help us make our body a sanctuary, but we have to want to do it.

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Moshe's blessing to the Jewish people was that each of us should want to make our bodies a Tabernacle. The rabbis say that Moshe's blessing was found in the Psalm which bears his name, Psalm 90, "May the favor of the Lord be upon you". May we all want to serve G-d. May we all want to make our bodies into a Tabernacle. It is not enough just to have a physical temple. It also must be filled with the unseen things, the things which do not occupy any space: devotion, love, dedication, compassion, etc.

In this Torah portion when it describes how each part of the Tabernacle was finished it uses the expression "Vayakhel" which is the same expression which G-d uses when He describes how the world is finished. The world is finished but it is not complete. The Tabernacle needs more than space. It also has to be filled with dedication, devotion, etc. We all hope and pray that all of us will want to make our own person a Tabernacle. Our body is complete but it must be filled with devotion, love, dedication, etc. in order for it to be a true Tabernacle.

VAYAKHEL-PEKUDAI 1993
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today is Parshas HaChodesh. This is the Shabbos before the month of Nisan and we read a special Torah portion for the Maftir. We take out two Torahs. The rabbis have arranged it that almost every year Parshas HaChodesh comes out on the Torah portion of Vayakhel and Pekudai. It seems strange that this particular Torah portion should be chosen to be read at Parshas HaChodesh. What's more, in the special Maftir that we read for this Shabbos we read about how the Jewish people were given the first two commandments. They were given the commandment to make Nisan the first of all the months and they were also commanded to take the lamb and to tether it for four days and then to slaughter it and, of course, to put its blood on the door and to actually make a seder. It would seem that G-d would not allow the Jewish people to gain their freedom until they first did these mitzvahs. The mitzvah of declaring time, of declaring which of the months is going to be the first month, until they did the mitzvah of taking the lamb and tethering it for four days and then slaughtering it and then the mitzvah of having a seder. It seems strange that this is what G-d wanted of the Jewish people before they would receive their freedom. It would seem that G-d would tell the Jewish people that they should arm themselves and that they should fight for their freedom. It would seem that this would be the best way that they could have achieved their freedom, and that is that they should have been able to defeat the Egyptian army in battle, but this is not what G-d wanted the Jewish people to do. Instead, G-d wanted the Jewish people to declare Nisan the first of all the months. He wanted them to take the lamb and to tether it for four days and then to slaughter it and put its blood on the door. Then He wanted them to have a seder in which they ate the lamb.

What's more, in the Torah portion Vayakhel in which we learn about how the Tabernacle was constructed we learn first about Shabbos. What does Shabbos have to do with the Tabernacle? Finally, at the end when the Tabernacle was completed it says, "And Moshe was not able to come into the Oah Moab because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle." It seems strange that it is repeated

here that the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle because it said that in the immediate sentence beforehand. It says, "And the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle." It also seems strange that Moshe was not able to enter into the Tabernacle when the cloud rested on it. After all, when he received the Torah he went up into the cloud. Why was it that he was not allowed to go into the Tabernacle when the cloud rested upon it at this particular time?

It seems to me that in this Torah portion and in the special Maftir that we are reading for Parshas HaChodesh G-d is telling us what is necessary in order for the Jews to survive. G-d knows that the Jewish history is going to stretch ahead for many thousands of years, and, therefore, He has let us hear what is absolutely necessary for Jewish history, for the Jewish people to survive. We know that sometimes the Jewish people have to take up arms in order to defend themselves, especially when they face an implacable enemy like Amalek or Hitler, but G-d did not want the Jewish people to think that they always had to rely on force of arms in order to survive, that they needed more than force of arms. They needed a strong belief in the fact that G-d needs us in order to help Him perfect the world and that G-d is ready to help us whenever we turn to Him. That is the most important element in the survival of the Jewish people, that most of the time we can get by even without having to take up arms. After all, since the time of the Bar Kochba rebellion which finished in the year 135 until the rise of the State of Israel the rabbis, by and large, did not want the Jewish people to take up arms because if they would have taken up arms they would have been suicidal. It is true that when Hitler came there was no other choice because Hitler founded Naziism which was a Messianic movement which believed that the world could be saved if all the Jews were killed, but during the Middle Ages the church and Islam did not want to kill the Jews; they wanted to convert us. Although it is true that there were pogroms and it is true that during the first crusade the Jewish communities along the Rhineland were annihilated and when Chelminitzky revolted against his Polish masters many

of the Cossack peasants that a third of the Jews were killed in Eastern Europe, but, by and large, the policy of non-resistance, of not taking up arms as a group served the Jewish people well because when a drunken mob would enter into a ghetto they would kill a few Jews who they would find in their hiding places but, by and large, most of the Jews would escape because when somebody offers no resistance usually a person gets tired. The mobs get tired and they withdrawn, but when you offer resistance they fight until they kill everyone. It is the same thing with a person who comes into your office and you want to get rid of him the easiest way to get rid of him is just to agree with everything he says and then he will leave. Of course, I am not asking a person to act deceitfully and to agree with whatever a person says so that you can get rid of him, but in many instances you do actually agree with him and if you are busy you just agree with him and then he has nothing more to say and he leaves. But why is it that Shabbos is talked about before we talk about the completion of the Mishkan?

The reason for that is that Shabbos is more important to Jewish survival than even temples or synagogues or houses of worship, that what G-d is telling us in this Maftir and in these Torah portions is that the most important thing to ensure Jewish survival is personal commitment, that you must be willing to give you time to Judaism. You must be willing to personally commit yourself to do the mitzvahs of Judaism, that it is more important that we observe Shabbos than that we even have synagogues. It is more important that we personally commit to observe Judaism in all our daily life than to give huge donations in order to make sure that we have houses of worship. In Europe the Jewish people were scattered in little villages with each little village having a Jewish store. Many of the villages did not have enough Jews in order to have a minyan so the Jewish people would not have a minyan even on Shabbos. They would only get together on the High Holidays to make sure that they had a minyan, and there was no problem with them assimilating. There was no problem with them intermarrying or acculturating. The reason for that was because they

were personally committed to furthering Judaism, and their children say that. Therefore, their children were committed as well. There was a foolish theory in America that was current for many years that all you needed to do in order to ensure Jewish survival was to have Jews belong to synagogues. Jews did not have to come to synagogues. All they had to do was write a check to make sure that they belonged to synagogues. If they identified with a synagogue then Jewish survival would be assured, but this we know is nonsense. You can belong to all the synagogues you want but that does not assure that you or your children will remain Jews. Also there was a feeling that Jewish ethnicity would make sure that the Jewish people survived, but Jewish ethnicity is not a very powerful tool for Jewish survival. It wanes after a generation or two and Jews become exactly the same as their neighbors. They do not have unique customs. They do not have unique languages. They do not have even a unique way of thinking. Therefore, this Parshas HaChodesh teaches the Jewish people what is necessary in order for us to survive throughout the generations.

We are going to, first of all, have to be willing to give our time to our religion. The second thing is we are going to have to have Jewish pride. That, of course, was the reason why they had to take the lamb and tether it for four days and then slaughter it. They had to be willing to stand out. They had to be willing to point out to the Egyptians that they did not believe in this spirit worship, that they did not believe that a spirit would incarnate into the lamb at this particular time of the year. They had to show that they were proud of their own Jewish ceremonies, that they put the blood on the door to show that they did not believe in the Egyptians' way of thinking, that you could manipulate malevolent spirits, that they were proud of who they were and what they were, and they had to demonstrate their pride.

So, in order for the Jewish people to survive, a Jew not only has to give time to his religion and practice its details but he also has to be proud of what he is doing. Many of the first generation Jews who came to America actually kept

the mitzvahs but they were not proud of it. They felt inferior. They felt that they were emotionally tied to it and they really did not want their children to really perform the mitzvahs. They were not proud of them. You also have to be proud of your Jewishness. The third thing is you have to be willing to teach your religion to your children and that, of course, was the purpose of the seder, was in order that the children should learn about G-d's miracles, that the children should understand that we were to be a vehicle of G-d's teachings in the world. Why, though, was it and is it that many Jews who really know what the secret of Jewish survival is, that it is a commitment to Jewish practice, that it is a commitment to Jewish pride, that it is important that we have to commit ourselves to teach our children, why don't they do those things which seem so obvious? The answer is because they really do not believe that they need G-d. They do not really believe that it is important that the Jewish people survive. They do not really believe that G-d needs us as a people in order to spread His teachings. After all, if the Torah is just a product of man and is just filled with manmade ideas, there are other men in the world. They can propagate these ideas, too. You really do not need the Jewish people anymore to propagate these ideas. They are really not sure that there is a G-d Who needs the Jewish people to exist and there is a G-d Who can help us. That is why it says here that Moshe was not able to come into the tent of meeting because the cloud rested upon it and the glory of G-d filled the Mishkan. What does that mean? It means that life is not clear. The future is not clear, and we all need G-d's help. We all need G-d's help in order to make this a better world. We all need G-d's help in order to overcome the problems of life, that G-d is there to help us. After all, most of the decisions we make in life we make blind. We do not know all the facts. We cannot know everything that we have to know in order to make correct decisions. After all, before we get married we do not interview 2 billion women. Before we choose a job or what our occupation is going to be we do not look at the thousands of jobs listed by

the Department of Labor. Most of the decisions we make in life we make blind, and we need G-d's help in order to make sure we make the right decisions. Therefore, we recognize the fact that G-d is there to help us and that we need G-d's help and also that G-d wants us to help Him perfect the world. If Jews do not really believe that then there is no real reason for them to want to perpetuate Judaism. There is no real reason for them to want to make the necessary sacrifices in order for Judaism to survive. After all, if Judaism is just a bunch of customs and folkways, why sacrifice for them? Why have to give up your time? Why do you have to be filled with Jewish pride? Why do you have to sacrifice all that effort and financial means in order to give your children a Jewish education? The answer is, of course, that you have to believe that G-d wants you to be a Jew, that G-d wants the Jewish message to be given to the world, that G-d is there to help you overcome all your problems, but if you feel that you do not need G-d, that you can accomplish everything yourself without G-d, then why should you do all these things? That is, too, why it talks about Shabbos and the building of the Mishkan and that the only commandment that is mentioned at this time is that you should not cause fire to go in all your habitations because fire is a symbol of man's creativity. We believe that G-d gave man fire when he left the Garden of Eden, that Adam sinned on Friday but G-d allowed him to stay in the Garden of Eden through Shabbos, but when Shabbos was over G-d told him he had to leave the Garden of Eden and man was afraid. He said, "How can I conquer this new world, this dark world?" G-d said, "I will give you fire and with fire you can accomplish great things. You can be a creative individual and shape your environment so it will be friendly to you and not hostile to you." So G-d gave man fire, but man's creativity is limited because fire can be very dangerous as well as very beneficial and man still needs G-d's help even though he has the ability to create, but if man believes he can do everything himself, that he does not need G-d, then why does he have to be Jewish? If he also believes that there is nothing particular in the Jewish message that the world needs, then why does

he need to have to help G-d perfect the world? It is important for Jewish survival, not just that we know how to manipulate arms. It is true sometimes we will have to fight, but the most important thing for Jewish survival is that we recognize that we need G-d, and that is why G-d, Himself, took us out of Egypt. He did not have us fight for our freedom because every Jew had to recognize that G-d had helped him and that G-d will always help us and that G-d wants us to help Him perfect this world. So, in order for the Jewish people to survive we must, first of all, believe that there is a G-d in the world, a G-d Who wants us to help him and Who will always help us and that in order for us to feel G-d's presence in the world we have to give our time to our religion and practice our religion. We have to be filled with Jewish pride, and we have to be willing to educate our children. If we do these things, then Judaism will survive and the message of Judaism will eventually spread throughout the world and G-d will always help us in all our endeavors. Let us hope and pray that this will truly be so so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

VAYAKHEL 1994
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we read the Torah portion Vayakhel, but today is also Parshas Parah. We take out two Torahs and in the second Torah we read about the red heifer. The reason why we read about the red heifer today is because it is a few weeks before Pesach, and the Jewish people had to be reminded that they had to be ritually pure before they could bring the Korban Pesach, the paschal offering, that if they had come into contact with the dead they had to go through a purification ceremony which required that on the third and seventh day they had to be sprinkled with a mixture of the ashes of the red heifer plus water and a few other things. This is the reason why we read about the red heifer today.

There are, though, several questions that we can ask about the red heifer. First of all, we know that there are two different types of ritual uncleanness. If a person comes into contact with a dead rodent or certain other dead animals they become ritually unclean and then all a person has to do is to immerse himself in a mikvah and then he becomes clean. However, if we come into contact with a dead human being then we cannot become clean by our own efforts. We had to be sprinkled by the ashes of the red heifer on the third and seventh day and, of course, immerse in a mikvah, and then we would become ritually clean. The question is, why this difference?

Also when we learn about the red heifer we learn about it in an anomaly. We learn that everybody who had a hand in preparing the red heifer become themselves ritually unclean, so all those who had a hand in preparing the ashes of the red heifer themselves became unclean, so actually the red heifer had the capacity of cleaning those who were unclean and making unclean those who were clean. It seems to be a great paradox.

Perhaps we can understand the answers to these two questions if we look in the Torah portion Vayakhel. The Torah portion Vayakhel starts out by telling us about the laws of Shabbos. Then after it mentions that anybody who does work on the Shabbos shall incur the death penalty, and, of course, this was just mainly theoretical

since it was very difficult procedurally to ever enforce the death penalty and, of course, we have not enforced the death penalty since 40 years before the destruction of the Temple, but it immediately follows that by saying, "You shall not kindle fire in all your habitations on the day of Shabbos." The rabbis ask, why was fire singled out? There are two different opinions in the Talmud. One opinion is it is singled out to teach us that fire is not as serious an offense as our other violations of the Shabbos and, therefore, the death penalty would not apply to kindling fire on Shabbos. Another opinion says that, no, fire contains the same severity of punishment as any of the other violations of the Sabbath; however, this is to teach us that if we by accident light a fire on Shabbos that we have to bring a sin offering. This applies to every other single act which we do unwittingly on Shabbos. If we committed unwittingly the 39 types of work on Shabbos we would have to leave 39 different sin offerings. Remember, in the Temple you were only allowed to bring a sacrifice if you did things unwittingly, if you did things by accident. If you did things on purpose you could not bring a sacrifice and thereby find atonement. It is just like unfortunately some people think they can cheat and treat people badly and then give a donation to UJA and it covers everything but it does not in Jewish law. If you do things by accident then bringing a sacrifice will atone, but if you do it on purpose then it will not atone. Other rabbis, however, say that we have to look at the context of this whole passage. They say that Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to build the Sanctuary before the Jewish people had committed the sin of the golden calf, but he was only told to build the Sanctuary after the sin of the golden calf. We are reminded in this particular instance that the Sanctuary should not be built on Shabbos. The reason that fire is mentioned here is because fire is a symbol of man's creativity. Fire also brought to mind the sin of the golden calf where the Jewish people threw into the fire the gold and the silver that they had and out came the golden calf. Fire, itself, has a problem with it in that not only can it be constructive but also destructive. We cannot have civilization

without fire. Without fire we cannot have any civilization. Fire allows us to cook our food and human beings can eat very few things that have not been cooked. We also need fire in order to prepare our tools so that we have clothes and homes and we need fire for industry. We need fire to produce energy so we can maintain heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer, so fire is a necessary component of civilization and without fire we cannot have civilization. On the other hand, fire is also a very destructive because if it gets out of control it will destroy everything and we know, of course, many great cities have been burnt to the ground by fire. Many civilizations have actually been destroyed by fire. We know, therefore, that we have to learn how to limit our uses of fire. If we use fire indiscriminately then we will destroy ourselves. That, of course, is what the Shabbos is meant to teach us that we must always hold tight rein on our creativity because creativity, in itself, can also lead to great destruction. You can create negatively as well as positively. The Holocaust should have taught us that. Therefore, when the Jewish people were building the Sanctuary they had to make known that although this was a great creative act their creativity had to be held in check to make sure they only did positive things and not destructive things. Also, fire stands for enthusiasm and for dedication and devotion to causes, but these have to be limited. They cannot go out of bounds. That's why the rabbis also say that this sentence teaches us that we cannot punish anybody on Shabbos for any sins that they committed, that we cannot enforce the death penalty or lashes or any other punishment on Shabbos to teach us that man is limited. When it comes to enforcing your enthusiasms, the things that burn in your soul and when a person thinks that he is really right that he has to recognize that perhaps he does not have the whole truth, that it is a very difficult thing when you are dealing with punishments, especially when you are dealing with enforcing death punishments. A person should never take upon himself these types of decisions but that these types of decisions should only be done based on justice and a system of law which includes many, many people so that

the decision could be correctly arrive at. Man must be very careful to make sure that his enthusiasms and the fires in his soul do not get out of hand. Of course, we have seen an illustration recently of what happens when the fires of man's soul get out of hand. We saw how the fanaticism of Baruch Goldstein cut down so many worshippers in the mosque and perhaps really did the opposite of what he intended to do. We must always be careful that our enthusiasms do not get out of hand.

In fact, this is why the Talmud teaches us that the schools of Shammai and the schools of Hillel argued in the Talmud. In fact, they argue in the Talmud on many, many issues. In fact, there are actually hundreds of controversies in which the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel disagree, but eventually it comes down to the fact that the Halacha is almost always decided in accordance with the school of Hillel except for a very few cases. The question is asked, why is it that the decisions were always rendered according to the school of Hillel and not according to the school of Shammai? It says because the people in the school of Hillel were willing to learn the teachings of the school of Shammai but the school of Shammai was not willing to learn the teachings of the school of Hillel, that the school of Hillel treated the disciples of the school of Shammai with respect but the pupils of the school of Shammai treated the students of the school of Hillel with derision so, therefore, the Halacha was decided according to the school of Hillel. Then the question could still be asked, why do we keep studying the decisions and the rulings and the reasoning of the school of Shammai if the Halacha is not according to the school of Shammai? Of course, the answer to that is because by our learning about the rules and reasoning of the school of Shammai it sharpens our own appreciation of the truth. We clarify our own truth if we learn the truths of other people. Even though we disagree with the truths we should still respect the fact that Beis Shammai was honestly searching for the truth even though we feel that they did not contain as much truth as our truth. The

The same thing applies today. We are Jews because we feel we have more truth than the surrounding religions and philosophies. If we did not then we would stop being Jews, as many Jews have stopped being Jews. We, of course, in the orthodoxy think we have more of the truth than the rest of the Jews, but this does not mean that we should not talk with other people because their truths actually sharpen our truths. As long as their truths do not lead to immorality and murder and gross misbehavior, then, of course, we should listen to their truth and see their point of view because that will help us sharpen our point of view. Yes, it is true that maybe some of our people will be influenced to join the opposite camp, but that is a risk that we take. Life is not risk free. The truth of the matter is that a few people from the school of Hillel went over to the school of Shammai but not very many. The school of Hillel's perception of the truth was greatly enhanced because they were able to study the rulings of the school of Shammai. We do not all have the whole truth. We just say we have more of the truth than the other schools.

This, of course, is what we mean when we say we have to limit the fires and enthusiasms of our souls. Sometimes our solutions to our problems seems so clear and obvious that we try to force them down the throats of other people and that, of course, is not the way to handle the situation. We have to discuss things with people. We all know how the Socialists and Communists of the previous generation thought they had the whole truth and they could force their views down the throats of everybody else. This is, of course, why when we talked about the red heifer we say that this red heifer has the potential to make unclean people clean and clean people unclean. The reason for that is when a person looks at other people as ritually unclean and he feels he has the capacity to clean them a certain arrogance creeps into that person. That person begins to feel that his opinions are better, that his opinions are supreme and, therefore, he begins to treat with disdain the other people. It is almost subconscious so, therefore, it is almost inevitable that they will not treat their people with whom they are cleansing with the proper amount of respect.

We also know, too, that when we deal with matters such as death we cannot take the initiative into our own hands when it comes to death. We have to consult people and be with people and we cannot take the law into our own hands. When we discuss these issues. We must be very careful that we take into account other people's opinion and that it is very important that we discuss our opinions with others who disagree with us so we can sharpen and clarify our own opinions. One of the problems with Israel today is the Rabin government does not seem to want to discuss its own policies with the opposition. Israel today really needs a national unity government where other opinions could be aired and discussions arrived at based upon the clarifications that other opinions give because if you feel that you only have the whole truth then it is going to be a difficult situation. You are going to try to ram the truth down the throats of other people, and your truth is not going to be clarified in the proper way. For example, if Jews and Arabs cannot live together on the West Bank, then how can Jews and Arabs live together in Israel? There are a million Arabs in Israel. What are you going to do, expel one million Arabs from Israel? It is a very difficult situation. The thing has to be thought through more clearly. Perhaps adjustments have to be made. Perhaps certain Jews have to be moved and certain Arabs have to be moved. Perhaps greater efforts could be made in order to cause Jews and Arabs to live together in harmony and peace, but you cannot blame just one side instead of the other side. More innocent Jews have been killed in spite of the massacre by fanatical Arabs than were killed by this Baruch Goldstein. WE have to put things in the proper perspective. We have to come to conclusions which will lead to correct assessments of future consequences, otherwise we are going to be in for a lot of trouble.

That, of course, is why we mention here about fire. The fire, the enthusiasms of our souls must be tempered, limited. We must take a Shabbos off to see how these things should be applied and how they could be applied.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who bought a watch and told his friend how wonderful the watch was. It was indestructible. It was dust proof and water proof. A week later his friend asked how his watch was. He said, "Oh, it doesn't exist anymore." The friend asked why and he said, "Well, it wasn't fire proof and it burned up." Of course, this is the problem here, too. We may so concentrate on a few problems that we forget about the other problems and the whole situation may burn up and flare up into a great conflaguration. That we do not want to happen. We do not want to raise expectations so high they cannot be fulfilled that will end up in people willing to go to war rather than not having their expectations fulfilled. We want to make sure that Arabs and Jews can live together in harmony in the Middle East and that certain temporary arrangements should not be looked at as permanent or as setting examples or as setting standards for future relationships which may be damaging to Jews and to Arabs. Let us all hope and pray that we will all temper our enthusiasms, that we will use the fire of our souls in the proper and correct way so that we arrive at the best solutions so peace will truly come in the Middle East. Amen.

VAYAKHEL 2000
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Vayakhel, immediately before we learn how the Tabernacle was constructed, we learn about the Shabbat. At the end of this paragraph about the Shabbat, the Torah states, "You shall not kindle fire in all your habitations on the day of the Sabbath." This seems to be a strange insertion. Why do we have to learn specifically about fire here? After all, there are 39 major categories of work we cannot do on Shabbat. On Shabbat, we are not to do any creative labors. All these labors change nature. Creative labor is defined as labor which changes nature. Animals do not change nature, and so, therefore, basically anything that animals do, we can do on Shabbat. Theoretically, we could move all the furniture in our house on Shabbat and would not be violating anything, but to strike a match would be to violate Shabbat because we are impressing our will on Shabbat. Why was fire singled out here?

There are many interpretations that are given by the rabbis why fire is singled out. One interpretation is that lighting fire on Shabbat is not as serious a violation as our doing the other major categories of work. Another interpretation is that we learn from here, according to Rashi, that if one violates several of the 39 major categories of work unwittingly he has to bring a

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sacrifice for each one of the infractions. The Rambam says that the reason fire is mentioned is because we might think that since fire is necessary for one's Shabbat, for enjoyment of Shabbat, we would be allowed to light fire. In fact, the Karites banned all fire from the beginning of Shabbat. Even the candles and the hearths which were lit before Shabbat had to be put out. We do not believe this. We believe you can use fire as long as it was lit before Shabbat. That's one of the reasons we have Shabbat candles so we can use its light to enhance our Shabbat meal. One of the ways you could tell whether a Jewish family were Karites or Rabinites was whether they had Shabbat candles.

Seforno teaches us that the reason that fire was singled out was because on Shabbat you can destroy things. There is no Biblical prohibition from destroying things on Shabbat, like tearing up paper, etc. Therefore, you might think that since fire is so destructive, that you could use it to destroy things on Shabbat. This sentence teaches us that you cannot.

The Talmud also teaches us that we learn from this sentence that you cannot impose the death penalty or other corporal punishment on anyone on Shabbat.

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Fire ;in Judaism also stands for passion, and it seems to me that there is another reason why we have this sentence, and that is that the word Los Sovaru can mean not only "you shall not kindle" but also "you shall not remove fire, enthusiasm in your habitations on the day of the Shabbat." So many people have misunderstood what Shabbat is about. Shabbat is not a day of doom and gloom. Shabbat is a day of happiness. We are supposed to be filled with excitement and enthusiasm. On this day we are not man, the creator, but man, the appreciator, man the relator, man the mediator. We are supposed to contemplate how we have the great privilege of being G-d's partner in creation, even though the world we have lived in for most of our history we have been persecuted and hounded and not allowed to do everything we can to perfect Jewish ideals. The restrictions of Shabbat are meant to create a temple in time. We know that to have a building, we must have walls. If we could have a building without walls and assure that we could still have the warmth, security, and privacy that we have when the building has walls, we would surely not erect walls. To have the spiritual uplift of the Shabbat we need the Shabbat restrictions to create a temple in time. We must, though, practice our Shabbat observances with enthusiasm and energy.

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In this same Torah portion, we learn how the laver in the courtyard of the temple, in which the priests purified themselves, was composed of the copper mirrors of the women. The rabbis teach us that originally Moshe did not want to accept these mirrors. After all, they were an object of vanity and passion, but G-d told Moshe to accept these mirrors because it was only because of the enthusiasm and hope and strength of the women that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. They did not give up. Even though Pharaoh had decreed that all the boys should be killed, they still wanted to have children. They used these mirrors to beautify themselves and to encourage their husbands not to give up hope.

Many times men look at situations without faith. They look at it only through logic and say, "What alternative do we have? Why have children if they are going to be killed?" That was also the men's sin of the golden calf. "Moshe is not coming down. What will we do? We need a new leader." That was also the men's sin about going into the land of Israel. "How can we enter Israel? There are giants there."

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Unfortunately, in our own day we hear people say, "We have to make agreements with the Arabs, even if they are not beneficial because what other choice do we have?" This is no argument. We can always wait. We can always have hope. The women had hope and enthusiasm. That's why G-d told Moshe to take their mirrors and use them to make the laver. That's why also there are no accurate measurements given for the laver because it all depended upon how many mirrors were donated. We should never remove enthusiasm and hope from our religious practices. Our religious practices must not be something that we do just by rote. They must constantly energize us. The priests, when they were to serve in the Temple, were to purify themselves in this laver composed of the women's mirrors to remind them to always preach a message of hope and to always perform the Temple services with enthusiasm and passion. We are not supposed to remove the passion from Shabbat or the passion from our relationships. This does not necessarily mean sexual passion, but the desire to sympathize and empathize with each other, the desire to allow us to have enthusiasm, friendships, and projects. The fire should never be removed from our habitations.

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I am reminded of the story of a middle aged couple who were sleeping. The women woke up and told her husband, "I have had a terrible dream. I dreamed that I died young." Her husband replied, "You have nothing to worry about. That's an impossible dream. You're not young." That was not being sensitive. That relationship was not the type of relationship we need. Let us all hope and pray that we will never remove the enthusiasm and fire and passion from our relationships so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.