

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashot Vayakhel-Pekudei
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פרשות ויקהל-פקודי
כ"ג באדר תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 35:1-40:38
Maftir Reading for *Shabbat Parah: Bemidbar* (Numbers) 19:1-22

In these *parshiyot* the Bnei Yisrael bring so many materials for the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) that Moshe tells them to stop; Betzalel and Oholiav, gifted craftspeople, construct the elements of the *Mishkan*. The work of constructing the *Mishkan* is completed; Moshe receives the command to anoint its vessels and to anoint Aharon and the *cohanim* (priests).

The beginning of *Parashat Vayakhel* reminds the people just before the construction of the *mishkan* begins that they are not to build on Shabbat (35:2): “שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה – מְלָאכָה, וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִהְיֶה לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבַּת שְׁבֹתוֹן, לַה' – 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 Hashem.”

One of the things that Jews are bidden to do is to emulate Hashem, referred to as *imitatio Dei* in scholarly circles. When we build the *mishkan*, the Jews' first house to Hashem, we are supposed to imitate God, working for six days and resting on the seventh, just as Hashem did when the world was created.

This leads to an interesting question. The Torah writes about the omnipotent God creating the world and spends two chapters on how it was done. God created light and darkness on the first day; separated the waters above from the waters below on the second day; created dry land and plants on the third; formed the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth; created birds and fish on the fifth; and the animals and humans on the sixth. If God is so powerful, why did Hashem not just snap the proverbial Divine fingers and cause the world to be completely created in an instant? Why did Hashem need to work for six days?

Like everything else in the Torah, the ways in which God acts serve as a model to us. The Torah demonstrates to us, through the example of God's toil, that we too should work hard for six days and rest on the seventh. Human beings are not meant to be a species of leisure; we are meant to bring purpose to our lives by working, by creating, by contributing our services to the growth and development of the world. Then, and only then, have we earned our rest, and only then can we fully appreciate the difference between Shabbat and the rest of the week.

This idea is commonly referred to as "the Protestant work ethic." We now see that the work ethic significantly precedes not only the Protestants, but the Jews, and even the human race. It is an ethic that is embodied (so to speak) by God and that appears in everything the Divine does even after the Creation. When God decides to destroy the world in a Flood, for example, Noah gets a warning first and has time enough to construct an Ark. Then it rains for 40 days, and the water remains for a year. God could have destroyed the world in one instant, but once again God opted to have the human, Noah, labor at building a massive boat before the Divine took over the "work" of causing the rain, leading to the destruction of the world as it had existed.

If we are grown-ups, we work to support ourselves and our families financially and to have a positive effect on the world. If we are children, our "work" is going to school and learning all we can so that we begin to understand the world and ourselves in order to take on a job when we grow up and also make a positive contribution to the world.

No one says that working – whatever your job may be, whether employment or schooling – is easy. What the Torah tells us is that working gives meaning to our lives and allows us to be more like God.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Can you think of any other examples from the Torah where Hashem "worked" rather than causing something to happen instantaneously?
- What is your current job? How does it give your life meaning and how does it improve the world?
- What else can we do to imitate God in our own lives?