

## These are the accountings of the Mishkan. (38:21)

The Torah dedicates four *parshiyos* to details of the construction of the *Mishkan*, its *keilim*, utensils, and the *Bigdei Kehunah*, Priestly vestments, worn by the *Kohanim* when they performed the *avodah*, service, in the *Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash*. Both *Parashas Vayakhel* and *Parashas Pekudei* recap the many contributions and utensils required for the construction of the *Mishkan*. All of this was for the place in which Hashem's *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, would repose here on earth. Basking in the *Shechinah's* Presence would seem to be the penultimate experience. Coming to Yerushalayim just to be in the Holy City, near the *Bais Hamikdash*, would appear to take precedence over anything else. Yet, *Chazal* teach that the *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim*, welcoming/reaching out to wayfarers (or anyone else who is in need of a place to rest, a meal, a warm conversation), takes precedence even over being *mekabel Pnei HaShechinah*, receiving the Divine Presence. This incredible idea is derived from the actions of our Patriarch, Avraham *Avinu*, who, while in midst of a conversation with Hashem, excused himself and went to tend to the needs of his guests. A Jew in need takes priority over everything.

What is it about providing hospitality that gives it such extraordinary status? Why did Avraham beg Hashem's "indulgence" while he went to tend to the needs of his guests? When Avraham did this, he essentially committed two acts that beg elucidation: he interrupted his visit from Hashem, something which is clearly beyond our ability to understand; he taught that tending to guests takes precedence over the experience of speaking with Hashem! *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, quotes the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos 4:22*, which teaches: "One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is worth more than a life of eternity in the World-to-Come." Hashem has placed us in this world for a purpose: to serve Him. This act of service is of greater value than any spiritual revelations that can be garnered either in this world or even in *Olam Habba*. Carrying out a *mitzvah* is of utmost significance and value. It is greater than studying Torah, reflecting upon Hashem's greatness, or even receiving the *Shechinah*. Regardless of the activity in which he is engaged, he must drop it to perform a *mitzvah*. [This does not negate Torah study as a *mitzvah*. I think the *Mashgiach* seems to be distinguishing between a *mitzvah* which focuses upon one's own personal spiritual advancement and a *mitzvah* which involves reaching out to and helping others. While the study of Torah benefits the entire universe, the immediate focus is on the individual's personal ascendancy.]

*Rav Wolbe* relates that *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, was once reciting *Shema* when he overheard two people arguing over whose obligation it was to bury someone who had passed away. (Personally, I am not sure why such people should be serving on the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society. It is a sacred privilege to be a member of this august group of volunteers. One who considers this work a burden obviously does not understand the meaning of "sacred" or "privilege.") Immediately, *Rav Yisrael*, the venerable founder of the *mussar*, ethical character refinement, movement, removed his *Tefillin* and *ran* to bury the man. Despite the fact that he was in the middle of *davening*, praying, reciting *Shema*, and that it was not his personal responsibility to attend to the burial of the deceased, *Rav Yisrael* moved without hesitancy. He was a man of action

who did not pause even for a moment when it involved the performance of a *mitzvah*.

One *Yom Kippur*, while *Rav Wolbe* was a student studying in the *Mirrer Yeshivah* in Europe, prior to *Mussaf* the *chazzan* sent a number of students to check on the welfare of one of the boys who was ill. "This is the obligation of the day," declared the *chazzan*. In other words, we are placed on this world to do, to act, to perform *mitzvos*. Performing a *mitzvah* (especially if it involves attending to both the physical and emotional needs of someone) takes precedence over *davening* on *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year.

How often do we become inspired by a good speech, a great *shiur* – and then what? How long does the inspiration last? We must immediately concretize our emotions by turning them into actions, thereby achieving more than one who has the unparalleled opportunity to speak with the *Shechinah*!