

Like everything that Hashem commanded Moshe, so did Bnei Yisrael perform all the labor... Moshe saw the entire work; and behold! They had done it as Hashem had commanded... And Moshe blessed them. (39:42,43)

Noticeably, the first *pasuk* which relates *Bnei Yisrael* following instructions and building the *Mishkan* uses the word *avodah* to describe the work performed. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* looks at the finished results, the Torah refers to it as *melachah*. While, on the surface, *melachah* and *avodah* are synonyms, a marked difference exists between them. *Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita*, explains that the word *melachah* has a close tie with *melech*, king, royalty. *Avodah*, on the other hand, is derived from *eved*, slave – clearly a salient difference. The fact that *avodah*, labor/work is connected to *eved*, slave, is quite understandable. A slave works and carries out all forms of tasks, mostly menial, for his master. *Melachah*, however, is related to *melech*, so it does not seem to be an appropriate term to be connected to work of any sort.

The *Rav* explains the “work” difference between that of a king/leader/manager and an *eved*, menial laborer. When a king chooses to commission a wall to be built around his city, he certainly does not personally dig the foundation, deliver the bricks, mix the cement and prepare the concrete. He, instead, issues directives, mulls over plans and diagrams, and stays in constant touch with his foremen to be apprised of the progress of the project. He leaves the heavy lifting and other tasks that require drudgery and exertion to the workers or *avadim*.

Avodah is typically the term used for the work one performs with his “hands.” It often requires minimal skill and is associated with manual or routine work. It is characterized by its repetitive and mundane nature. *Melachah* is work which connects the mind, the center of creativity, to tasks which require imagination, aforethought and purpose.

Concerning *Hilchos Shabbos*, the concept that determines the integrity of an act of labor, is *melech machsheves*. Loosely translated, this means work with thought or creative labor. As Hashem rested from the work of Creation, i.e., creative labor, so too, are we prohibited from performing labor on *Shabbos*. *Melech machsheves* is not just physical work. It is the intent behind this act of labor that determines the labor status. One’s actions must involve creative planning, design or intent to create in order to be considered a violation of the laws of *Shabbos*.

Having distinguished between *avodah* and *melachah*, we return to the distinction in the Torah’s narrative between the *avodah* which the people performed and the *melachah* which Moshe blessed. To “see the *avodah*” means to look and take note of the physical measurements and the placement of the materials in their proper places. Moshe looked over their work and saw that everything followed in accordance with the Heavenly design. Now, came the real test – one that only Moshe could discern and judge.

Was their work imbued with the Heavenly intentions and accompanying spiritual perfection that would imbue the finished product with *kedushah*, sanctity? Was their work simple *avodah*, or had it achieved *melachah* status? Once Moshe deliberated and carefully considered the profundity of their work, he came to the conclusion that, indeed, it was worthy of the title *melachah*. Thus, he blessed their work – because it was *meleches hakodesh*, holy *melachah*. This was not simple mundane, physical effort. Theirs was not mere work carried out with their hands, but rather, with their hearts, imbuing every aspect of their task with the correct intentions for Hashem to rest His *Shechinah* on the edifice that they had prepared.

Rav Nebentzhal cites the well-known story that occurred concerning *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, and the subsequent lesson and commentary to be derived therein. The *Volozhiner Yeshivah* maintained the services of a *meshulach*, fundraiser, who trudged from town to town, village to village, to collect whatever funds he could to support the premier *yeshivah* of its day. It would take him considerable time to walk from place to place and then return to the *yeshivah*. He came upon an idea which he felt would eliminate three quarters of his time, thereby allowing him to visit even more communities. He would get a horse and carriage, complete with driver, and thereby raise more funds, which would cover the added expense. *Rav Chaim* authorized the expenditure. His idea was quite successful, as he was able to reach a larger group of donors, who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to contribute to Volozhin. After scanning the list of donors, the *Rosh Yeshivah* noticed that one name was missing. He inquired of the *meshulach* if the man was well. The *meshulach* replied that he was fine. He refused to give his annual donation, however, claiming that he supported Torah – not horses. When *Rav Chaim* heard this, he told the *meshulach*, “The next time you travel, I will come along to speak to that man.” (Apparently, this man’s yearly contribution was substantial.)

When the man beheld the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Volozhin himself alight from the carriage, he ran out and bent over backwards to give proper *kavod*, honor, to *Rav Chaim*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was polite, but he had little time for small talk. He immediately came to the point.

“My friend, we all know that Betzalel, the architect of the *Mishkan*, was imbued with uncanny wisdom, insight, knowledge and all manner of craftsmanship. The Torah adds *V’lachshov machashavos*; in addition to his other exceptional attributes, Betzalel was granted an added quality – ‘to think thoughts.’ What thoughts was he thinking, and what does it have to do with the *Mishkan*?

“Moshe was instructed to collect donations from every generous-hearted Jew. ‘Generous-hearted’ is a broad term encompassing many forms and levels of generosity. Some are more generous than others, while some who are generous give with greater heart-felt feeling than others. Betzalel’s depth of perception, inspired by *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, was able to penetrate the *machashavos*, inner thoughts and motivations of the contributors, to discern the various thoughts behind each donation. The donations of those who gave with all their hearts went to the *Aron HaKodesh*. The donations of those who gave less than whole-heartedly went to the

Shulchan, Table, *Menorah* or *Mizbayach HaZahav*, Golden Altar. Every donation was directed towards an appropriate vessel. The *Mishkan* required wood beams, pegs and sockets.

Donors whose hearts were on a much lower echelon provided for the external structure.

“The same is true of every donation to our *yeshivah*. A donor who gives freely and generously, who wants to support Torah, will see his money providing sustenance for those who are learning. One who gives under pressure, not because he really wants to give, will see his money sustaining the horse’s hay and the oil for the carriage wheels.”

The man was appeased and immediately gave *Rav Chaim* a sizable donation for the *yeshivah*.