



Prayer's Parallel, Perfectly Planned

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

AFTER SPEAKING ABOUT THE MISHKAN (THE Tabernacle) for the past few weeks, this week's Torah portion again walks us through the way the donated material was used to make vessels and Priestly garments. The Torah emphasizes that every aspect of the construction and assembly of the *Mishkan*—which items were made out of each material, with exact dimensions and placements—was done precisely “*ka'asher tziva Hashem ess Moshe*, as G-d commanded Moshe.” In fact, that phrase is used eighteen times in Parashas Pikudei! Being that there are no coincidences in the Torah, *Baal Haturim* explains that this number alludes to the eighteen blessings recited three times a day in the *Amidah* prayer, known as the *Sh'moneh Esrei* (“Eighteen,” in Hebrew).

This begs the question: What is the connection between building the *Mishkan* and prayer?

The first thing that comes to mind is the famous Gemara that brings two opinions regarding the origins of our prayers:

We have learned: Rabbi Yosi, son of Rabbi Chanina, said the Patriarchs instituted the [three daily] prayers. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said [the Men of the Great Assembly] instituted them to correspond with the daily [Temple] offerings. (Talmud, B'rachos 26b)

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi's position answers our question neatly. Being that we don't have a Holy Temple and *korbanos*—sacrifices, a term related to the Hebrew word *karov*, close—any more, how are we supposed to get close to Hashem? Through what can we get atonement for our sins? Prayer therefore was instituted to substitute and help us strengthen our bond with our Creator.

The *Mishkan* housed the altar on which sacrifices were brought. We therefore can begin to understand, at some level, the connection between eighteen verses and eighteen blessings.

However according to Rabbi Yosi, son of Rabbi Chanina, we are still left with a question.

I recently heard a different, but beautiful and profound, explanation of the *Baal Haturim's* comment:

We know that Betzalel was put in charge of building the *Mishkan* and its vessels. Why Betzalel?

[Hashem has] filled him with a G-dly spirit; with wisdom, insight, knowledge, and craftsmanship. (35:32)

We are accustomed to viewing artists as free-thinking, creative spirits, valuing self-expression over adherence to strict guidelines. Using artistic license, they let their personalities flow, sometimes drawing funny or scary pictures. Sometimes they themselves have no idea how a particular job will pan out when they begin it. (And, at times, the viewer has no idea, even afterwards, what he is looking at!)

Since many of the specifications for the *Mishkan* weren't set in stone, so to speak, deviations from the blueprints wouldn't necessarily invalidate it... right? One could have expected Betzalel, with his “artistic spirit,” to improvise, in an attempt to “improve” on G-d's plans.

But Betzalel understood that the *Mishkan* and its vessels were not just designed by any old architect, trying to make things useful or practical. (“We need light, so let's put a Menorah there. And we need a place to lay the *Lechem Hapanim*—the Showbread—so let's design an original table...”) Rather, it was

going to be a *Mikdash shel Mattah*, an Earthly Sanctuary, which was supposed to mirror the *Mikdash shel Ma'alah*, the Heavenly Sanctuary. Every single detail of the *Mishkan* was meant to affect or symbolize something in the heavenly spheres.

Betzalel knew all of this—and, as the Torah stresses, he was extremely careful to follow every instruction, down to the final detail.

Similarly, I have heard people complain, “Isn't the *Sh'moneh Esrei* outdated? The *Anshei K'nesses haG'dolah* (the Men of the Great Assembly) composed it over 2,000 years ago. That is enough time for our daily needs to change! If I were writing the script, I wouldn't mention Jerusalem so many times. I would find a place to insert a prayer for winning the lottery and, depending on the season, the World Series or the Super Bowl.”

Unfortunately certain groups—Heaven spare us!—have modified the wording of the traditional *Sh'moneh Esrei*, because of this lack of understanding

I think the response is as follows.

Many members of the Great Assembly were prophets, and they composed the prayers with Divine inspiration. As a matter of fact, the *Tur* (O. C. 113) writes that the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* (the mystics of Medieval Germany) meticulously studied the significance of every word of the *Sh'moneh Esrei*. They demonstrated that not a word is extra; everything, even the number of words in each paragraph, can be accounted for.

Rabbeinu Yechiel (brother of the *Tur*, son of the *Rosh*) found that the number of words in each benediction corresponds to the number of words in the Torah that address the same theme. The blessing about healing, for instance,

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has 27 words, corresponding to Sh'mos 15:26, in which Hashem promises to be our Healer.

The *Tur* himself notes that the combined numerical value of the initial letters of each blessing of the *Sh'moneh Esrei* is 1,800, corresponding to the 1,800 angels who bring our prayers heavenward.

Over the next few Shabbos services, pay attention to the end of the fourth blessing of each one's *Amidah*. On Friday night, we say

Grant us, Hashem, our G-d, with love and favor, Your holy Shabbos, and Israel, the sanctifiers of Your name, will rest **vah—on it**.

The Hebrew word *vah* is feminine—literally, “on her.” But on Shabbos morning, that word changes to the masculine *vo*, “on him.” And in the afternoon service, it becomes *vum*, “on them.” Where is the consistency?

Sefer Mekor haT'fillah explains that the combined numerical value of those three words is 57, which divided by three equals 19—alluding to the 19 blessings in the weekday *Sh'moneh Esrei*!

Suffice it say that our prayers have cosmic significance, and the words of the *siddur* are a lot deeper than what meets the eye.

This can also be illustrated in a story told by a close disciple of Rabbi Yehezkel Abramsky.

A friend of his once underwent a difficult kidney transplant. Some time afterward, Rabbi Abramsky sighed in empathy and remarked, “I pray *every day* that I shouldn't have to undergo such a procedure.”

The surprised student asked the rabbi to explain himself.

Rabbi Abramsky responded that his request was part of the third blessing of *Birkas haMazon* (the Grace after Meals)!

Please don't make us dependent on gifts of *flesh and blood*.

The student challenged this explanation. Isn't the simple meaning of that

At the Kollel

Chavrusos are available

for private and group learning—
speak to Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!

weekdays: noon–1
Sunday–Thursday: 8–9:45

Minyanim for Standard Time

Shacharis

Sunday8:15 AM
Monday–Friday7:20 AM

Mincha

Sunday *thru January*1:15 PM
Mon.–Thurs. *thru January*2:35 PM
Sunday–Thurs., *Feb.–Mar.*5:45 PM
Shabbos2:45 PM

Ma'ariv

In the Beis Midrash:

Sunday–Wednesday9:45 PM
Thursday10 PM

request that we shouldn't need *monetary* gifts, from humans?

Rabbi Abramsky smiled and explained that our Sages incorporated every need we might ever have into the text of the standard prayers. If we are ever able to “read” a special request into the words of the *siddur*, it was also included in the original intention of that prayer! Our Sages established the “standard” wording of the text with Divine inspiration, articulating within it every feeling we could possibly wish to express.

Many times, when we are going through difficult situations, we begin our prayers with a heavy heart. But then, all of a sudden, words that we have said thousands of times jump out at us, possessing newfound meanings which describe or fit perfectly into the feelings that we want to convey—meanings which have been there all along, waiting for us to discover them in our time of need.

With this new, eye-opening observation, let's appreciate the way our Sages organized our prayers, and, instead of waiting for things to get rough, let's take the time to gain deeper insights from the *siddur* every day. 🙏

Every Day

🙏🙏 “Dirshu” Gemara Shiur

(Maseches Y'vamos)
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

🙏🙏 Kollel Yisgaber K'ari (amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

🙏🙏 Kitzur Shuchan Aruch

Live video conference!
Rabbi Dani Schon.....
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

🙏 Daf Yomi

Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

🙏🙏 Nightly Halacha Chabura

Rabbi Dani Schon
& Binyamin Teitelbaum
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Sunday *Free brunch!*

🙏🙏 America Runs on Torah

(Jewish Law & Parasha)
Rabbi Dani Schon
and Yisroel Kaufman..... 10 AM
Grand Deluxe breakfast served

🙏 Shivti

(Self-contained learning, geared
toward practical halacha) 10–noon A

Tuesday

🙏🙏 Partners in Torah at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

Wednesday

🙏🙏 Torah Treasures for Seniors at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

🙏🙏 Downtown Lunch-n- Learn at Strauss & Troy

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

Thursday

🙏🙏 Halacha based on the parasha

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM
Homemade refreshments served.

KEY: 🙏🙏 Beginners
🙏 Intermediate
🙏 Advanced
🙏🙏 for men and women