



Pardes's Parsha Discussion with Rabbi Alex Israel

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

Vayakhel-Pikudei. Together and Apart

I think there is one topic on people's mind this week. It is the fact that most of us will be spending Shabbat in our family units, in the absence of community, without shul and away from friends.

How interesting that this week's parsha is called Vayakhel, indicating gathering or collectivity – precisely what we are unable to do this week. Let me share a passage from Rav S.Y. Zevin's book:

“Parashat Pikudei gives a listing of the dimensions and weight of each of the items of the Mishkan. In this sense Pikudei is understood as an inventory. This is a stark contrast to the sense of “Vayakhel” in the sense of “assembly” which bespeaks community and collective. And most years these Parshiot are read together!

We can speak broadly of two classic schools of thought:

The first speaks of the collective as the central apparatus of society; the individual lacks significance in itself, but functions as merely a cog in the larger machine that is the community. In this view, there is no need to consider the concerns of the individual; one could sacrifice thousands of individuals on the altar of broader society.

The second sees the individual at the center, the atomized individual. The collective is only there to serve the individual.

In our world, we have socialism on the one hand and anarchism on the other.

Neither of these align with the spirit of Torah: The individual needs the collective and the collective needs the individual.

“Anyone who saves a life ... is as if they have saved the world!” (Sanhedrin 4:5) Every person, on their own, is an “entire world!” And conversely: “Who is like you, O Israel, a single nation in the land” (I Chron 17:21) – together they become a single nation.

The individual is of value; the collective has value. This is the hybrid created by “Vayakhel-Pikudei.” (Rav S.Z. Zevin LaTorah veLaMoadim pg.126)

This message could not be more pertinent at the current time when many of us are relegated to our homes.

Please discuss:

- What dimension or focus do you connect with more: the collective or the individual?
- If you connect with one focus (say – individual), how do you act to strengthen the value of the counter-value?
- Will you miss the community, shul, this Shabbat? What can you do to compensate?
- If you are isolated at home, not attending school, etc. can you think of three actions you can do in order to make your “collective” sensibility stronger?
- The Talmud talks about praying for the sick:

Rabbi Yossi says that it is appropriate to pray: May the Omnipresent have compassion upon you **among the sick people of Israel**, ...Rabbi Ḥanina said: One who has a sick person in his house must include him among the sick people of Israel. (Shabbat 12b)

- Why, if I am concerned about a specific patient, should I include him or her “among the sick of Israel”? What might be the purpose of this?

Communal prayer has many advantages. In the first instance a community will never pray for a thing which is hurtful for a particular individual, while the latter might pray for something [to the disadvantage of others, or another may pray for something] that is to his disadvantage.

...Another is that an individual rarely accomplishes his prayer without slips and errors. It has been recommended, therefore, that the individual recite the prayers of a community, and if possible in a community of not less than ten persons, so that one person makes up for the forgetfulness and error of the other.

...A person who prays but for himself is like one who retires alone into his house, refusing to assist his fellow-citizens in the repair of their walls. His expenditure is as great as his risk. He, however, who joins the majority spends little, yet remains in safety, because one replaces the defects of the other. (Kuzari III:17)

We each assist one another. When you think about it, we individuals are staying at home, not just to be protected, but to serve the public, to prevent ourselves spreading the disease. Our concern is certainly a collective one.

Shabbat Shalom!