



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בהעלותך תש"ע ❧ ❧ ❧ *Parshas Beha'aloscha 5770*

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

THE ORIGIN OF THE MELACHOS

One of the most well-known Mishnayos in Masechta Shabbos is the Mishnah that lists the various *melachos* (types of labor forbidden on *Shabbos*). As we shall see, there is one *melachah* in particular that is intertwined with a key subject of our *parshah*. The Mishnah (*Shabbos 7:1*) states:

אַבוֹת מְלָאכוֹת אֶרְבָּעִים חֶסֶר אֶחָת. הַזֹּרֵעַ. וְהַחוֹרֵשׁ...
הַכוֹתֵב שְׁתֵּי אוֹתִיּוֹת. וְהַמוֹחֵק עַל מְנַת לְכַתֵּב שְׁתֵּי
אוֹתִיּוֹת. הַבוֹנֶה. וְהַסּוֹתֵר... הַמוֹצִיא מְרֻשּׁוֹת לְרֻשּׁוֹת.

“There are thirty-nine principle types of forbidden labor: sowing, plowing... writing two letters, erasing for the purpose of writing two letters, building, dismantling... and transporting from one domain to another.”

Where does the “magic number” of thirty-nine come from? At one point in the Torah (toward the end of *sefer Shemos*), we find two adjoining topics: the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the imperative to refrain from work on *Shabbos*. This juxtaposition is by no means arbitrary, of course; rather, the Torah is pointing to the Mishkan to illustrate exactly which labors are forbidden to be performed on *Shabbos*. In other words, whatever was necessary for Mishkan construction is a type of activity that may not be performed on *Shabbos*. Since there were thirty-nine types of labor utilized in fashioning the Mishkan, as listed in the Mishnah (some of which are quoted above), there are thirty-nine *melachos* that are proscribed on the Sabbath (*Shabbos 49b*).

In general, *melachos* are only (Biblically) forbidden when they are positive, constructive acts. This applies to seemingly “destructive” *melachos*, as well. As we saw in the Mishnah, erasing, for example, is proscribed only when done for the purpose of clearing the way for more writing. Similarly, the forbidden act of dismantling refers to a scenario such as a building being cleared for the purpose of erecting a new one (see *Rashi, Shabbos 31b, s.v. “L’olam”*).

The Gemara (*Shabbos 31b*) cites the opinion of R’ Yose, who adds yet another condition to the prohibition of dismantling. According to R’ Yose, this *melachah* is only forbidden if the new construction will take place in the exact spot where the demolished structure had stood.

GOING IN CIRCLES?

This condition raises an issue, as the Gemara itself points out. As mentioned, the Mishkan is the source for all forbidden labors; what was done in the Mishkan, and the manner in which it was done, cannot be duplicated on *Shabbos*. How does R’ Yose’s condition for the *melachah* of *soseir* (dismantling) square with the procedures of the Mishkan? The Mishkan was B’nei Yisrael’s portable sanctuary in the desert, which was dismantled when they were signaled by Hashem to resume their travels. It was then re-erected when they were told to encamp.

In other words, the only dismantling that took place in the Mishkan was for the purpose of erecting it specifically *somewhere else!* So how could R’ Yose contend that dismantling is forbidden only when

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done for the purpose of building in the same place?

The Gemara asks, and the Gemara answers. The whole issue is (apparently) cleared up by a verse in this week's *parshah* (*Bamidbar 10:23*): על פי ה' יקענו – "They encamped by the Word of Hashem, and they travelled by the Word of Hashem". The Gemara explains that – because of this element of "al pi Hashem" (by the Word of Hashem) – it was considered as if the reconstruction would occur in the same place as the dismantling (*Shabbos Ibid.*).

Quoting the Gemara is one thing; understanding it is another. How is the difficulty resolved by this verse? After all, aren't we still left with the basic problem that the Mishkan was dismantled in one location and set up again somewhere else entirely? How do the words "al pi Hashem" (by the Word of Hashem) transform that new place into the old one?

THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

According to R' Naftoli Trop of Radin, the Gemara can be understood in light of another verse in this week's *parshah*. Speaking of the state of B'nei Yisrael in the wilderness, the *passuk* compares the care the Jewish people received to that of a baby: "As the nursemaid carries the infant," (*Ibid. 11:12*). In a sense, a baby doesn't have a "place" of its own; totally dependent on and borne by its mother, the child is basically subordinate to her. It goes wherever the mother goes. The same was true with B'nei Yisrael. All of their travels were orchestrated and directed "al pi Hashem" – by the Word of Hashem. As such, they were never really considered to be anchored in a place of their own. Rather, whether they went here or there, they were always in Hashem's domain. In this sense, wherever B'nei Yisrael would halt their travels was considered the same place in which they began (*P'ninim Mishulchan Gavohah, parshas Beha'aloscha*).

R' Elya Baruch Kammai of Mir submits an alternative and novel resolution to this problem. In a very practical sense, he contends, the place of reconstruction was in fact the same exact location of the dismantling. Another aspect of the desert travel mentioned in the *parshah* is the Clouds of Glory, which would surround and accompany the Jews. According to the Zohar, the Mishkan would constantly rest on a specific cloud-base. This particular cloud had a name; it was called none other than – *Pi Hashem!*

And so, the Mishkan was taken down and erected in the exact same location; for the Mishkan always resided *Al* (on) *Pi Hashem* (*Ibid.*).

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