



Ohr Yerushalayim News

14th March 2015 - Volume 7 - Issue 36 – פרשת כי תשא – כ"ג אדר תשע"ה

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

מזל טוב

Mazal Tov to Dr and Mrs Bernstein on birth of a granddaughter to Mr and Mrs Menachem Sher.

Mazel Tov to Mr & Mrs Dan Smith on the forthcoming wedding on Sunday of their daughter Dalia to AY Nemetsky. The Chupa is at 3.00pm in Beis Yaakov hall followed by a reception until 5.00pm. Simchas Chosson v'Kalloh is from 10.30pm in Beis Yaakov Hall.

Pesach Shiurim

The first of the Rov's Pesach Shiurim for men takes place on Shabbos before the second Minyan for Mincha. The first Ladies Shiur takes place on Tuesday in Shul.

מעות חיסין

Donations can be made to the Rov for מעות חיסין for distribution to needy local families to cover Pesach expenses.

מכירת חמץ

The Rov will be available for the sale of Chometz either at his home by arrangement, or after Davenning in Shul.

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

Three millennia is a long time in politics

Dani Epstein

Many of us will be familiar with non-newtonian fluids without perhaps realising that fact. The most common example would be ketchup. A less common but well-known fluid with non-newtonian properties is commonly known as gloop or oobleck, which is a mixture of corn starch and water. This has the remarkable property of behaving as a fluid and a semi-solid. One can walk or run across a pool filled with gloop, but if you stand still you will sink. There are many other amusing experiments one can do with this fluid, such as getting one hand wet and the other remaining perfectly dry, depending on how the fluid is handled.

What is so fascinating about this fluid is that it defies the norms, or perhaps refuses to be pigeon-holed according to our expectations. It is either a solid, a liquid, or perhaps neither a true solid nor a true liquid. It's confusing, and simply calling it a non-newtonian fluid fails to convey this dichotomy.

In much the same vein, exactly what political-economic system the Torah espouses is difficult to pin down. Is it a theocracy? Surely it is a monarchy? Perhaps a theocratic monarchy? Or a dictatorship of some kind?

The nature of a society's economic system defines it politically as well financially. China, Cuba and North Korea all enjoy a centrally planned economy (OK, that does not really apply to North Korea who do not actually have an economy to speak of) which classifies them as "communist", even though this utopic ideal is nothing but that: an ideal with little actuality. G7 countries are rabidly capitalistic to their great detriment, and espouse a free market economy as inherent to the democratic rubric, whether or not there is any truth to this claim.

So is the Torah capitalistic, socialist or slightly communist?

This question – the nature of the Torah's political-economic model – can easily be answered in a book or four, so it's not really going to happen here. Vayakhel does provide, however, some deep and fundamental insights into the system.

The Mishkon was to be the biggest and most important project undertaken

in the wilderness. It was central to their very existence, was to be the locus for the Bnei Yisroel for the revelation of the shechinoh. It could have been an ideal opportunity to reinforce whatever political and class structure that existed at the time, and politics there was in abundance. One only has to look to Korach and his henchman for a great example.

Yet the call went out to everyone. Moshe spoke to **יְשׁוּרָאֵל** – all the Bnei Yisroel; not just the wealthy or the elite. There was no specific order or procedure for anyone to make donations. In fact the nesim, the princes or tribal leaders, thought that they would make up the shortfall and as it turned out they were late to the party and were only able to donate the gems for the choshen (breastplate).

And who turned up first? Was it the great zadikim who were running to donate to such an important cause? Perhaps the wealthy who could afford to hand over vast quantities of gold and other precious materials?

The posuk says **וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים עַל הַנָּשִׁים** – the men were trailing their wives. It was the women who surged forwards joyfully, knowing instinctively that this was the right thing to do. Their husbands were playing a game of catchup, and went along to reassure the treasurers that they supported their wives decision and permitted the donation (for the gold that did not belong specifically to their wives).

So who was the master architect of the project? It should have been the supreme leader, Moshe. Or at least he should have been nominally in charge of such a prestigious project, just like Kim Jong Ding-A-Ling of North Korean fame is in charge of every major project in his country, providing the people who actually do the work with "field guidance" which they then record quotes thereof on a plaque for all to observe, in years to come, the genius of their Beloved And Wise Leader Who Knows Stuff And Who Said Clever Things.

Not so in this case. The gemoroh in Berochos (55a) has a rather illuminating vignette.

Hashem asked Moshe: "Do you think Betzael is up to the job?"

Moshe replied: "Master of the universe, if You think he is suitable for the job, then certainly I concur!"

The Week Ahead

פרשת ויקהל-פקודי	מברכין ניסן
Candle Lighting	5.53pm
Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	5.58pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.22am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Hilchos Pesach Shiur	5.09pm
2nd Mincha	5.39pm
Seuda Shlishis	following
Motzei Shabbos	6.59pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Monday / Thursday	6.45am / 7.10am
Tuesday / Wednesday / Friday	6.45am / 7.20am
Mincha & Maariv	5.50pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

Hashem said "Go and ask the Bnei Yisroel for their opinion."
So he did. And they replied in the same way as Moshe did to Hashem. "If Hashem thinks he is suitable, then surely we do!"
Concludes Rav Yitzchok from this episode: one may not appoint a leader over the community without consulting it.

Now this sounds a bit like democracy, and less like a dictatorship. But not quite. Because once someone is appointed to a job, then they stay in the job until they die, or become unfit for it – whichever comes first (although technically speaking, someone who dies is usually considered unfit for duty, but let's not split hairs). This in fact is a pretty good idea, since our current system – voting every few years – encourages short-term planning and makes long-term projects a complete nightmare, as the Conservatives start the HS2 rail project with an eye on modernising Britain's transport infrastructure right across the board, and Labour will probably finish it off as a debt-ridden, half-baked white elephant that they will use as a whip over their rivals and the public will essentially watch billions being rolled up and smoked by the people they voted in to the monkey's tea party that is Parliament, and every company that has its snout in the trough.

So Moshe informed the populace that Hashem did not want him in charge, but wanted Betzalel to be the team leader, who just happened to be from Yehudah, the tribe who were the source of royalty. Well, that was quite a politically-charged choice. And just when everyone started whining about "privilege" and "class", Oholiov from the tribe of Dan, the least respected of all, was appointed second-in-command by divine fiat.

Now Moshe had all the plans in his hand, and called everyone to a planning meeting. The question was, what was the management structure like?

If one had the opportunity to watch a team designing the next iPhone, or perhaps more interestingly the next Samsung Galaxy Note (we are trying to get this column sponsored by South Korea, and anyway it's a proper phone, unlike the Apple offering which is just shiny plastic) one would observe a distinct hierarchy. The senior designer is not the same person that figures out where to put those really tiny and fiddly diodes, capacitors and resistors on the printed circuit board. Those things are taken care of by the shleppers at the bottom of the pile.

This appears to be true of the Mishkon as well, since it was Betzalel, and only Betzalel, who made the oron, the Ark of the Covenant. Certainly one would not have expected Betzalel to sit there with a shmatte polishing the hooks for the curtains of the courtyard.

Yet when it came to the first job on the list – making a roof for the Mishkon – there he was working with all the craftsmen to get that first job completed as soon as possible. Every craftsmen and -woman got down to making the "roof" of the Mishkon in one team, as the posuk (36:8) says: **וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל הָעָם** – and all the wise of heart of the craftsmen made the Mishkon, which in this case refers to the roof. Perhaps this is not too surprising, as around election time not only to candidates kiss babies and cute monkeys, they also have been know to take off their jackets and pretend to do some real work.

One of the more endearing traits of the dictator, supreme leader or the Pope is their infallibility. Whatever they say (perhaps not entirely so in the case of the Pope) is not only correct, but wise and laudable.

Take, for example, the backyard furnaces that Chairman Mao encouraged as part of the Great Leap Forward. Having as much knowledge of metallurgy as I have of conjugating irregular Chinese verbs, Mao's distrust of intellectuals and rather misplaced faith in the power of the mass mobilization of the peasants resulted in denuded forests, unharvested crops and low quality pig iron of little economic value. As a result of this wise decision and several others of this calibre, a savage famine ensued and 40,000,000 people died. 40,000,000! It beggars belief. All because the Great Leader wanted a Great Leap Forward.

So, when you have a prophet who has the imprimatur of Hashem Himself, surely he can do no wrong? Surely everything he says must be correct and sacred and infallible.

Continues the gemoro quoted above: at the time Hashem said to Moshe "Go and tell Betzalel to make me a Mishkon, ark, and vessels," Moshe inverted the instructions and said: "Make an ark, vessels and Mishkon". Betzalel said to him: "Moshe our teacher, the custom is to build the house first then one brings in vessels. You have told me to make the vessels first; if I make then where will I put them?"

"Perhaps you were in the shadow of Hashem (**ל-בצל א**), and you knew!"
Exclaimed Moshe. In other words, Moshe got it wrong. Betzalel, who until now was a complete nobody and only recently had risen to the ranks,

pointed out a basic mistake Moshe had made. Under dictatorial regimes, Betzalel would have been whipped and then hung in a public ceremony after having his eyes poked out. This is what happens to people who contradict the Great Leader.

But the Torah system does not work that way. Even Moshe – the greatest prophet to walk the earth bar none – who was conveying a message from Hashem that he had heard as plain as the nose on his face, even such a person is not expected to get everything perfect the first time round. Our culture and the Torah simply do not foster, or should not foster, the notion of infallibility. So, if Moshe got things wrong, and the Torah as well as Chazal make this quite clear that he did so on numerous occasions, then our gedolim today cannot be infallible either. If Betzalel was able to argue with Moshe, then anyone today can argue with whoever. The Torah does not allow for infallibility.

Not only that, there are various examples in the Talmud where even Hashem seems to lose an argument. One famous example is recounted in Bovo Metziah (59b) wherein Rav Eliezer is in pitched battle with the Chachomim. He has Heaven demonstrate the virtue of his position by causing various miracles, the Chachomim stand resolute against his positions, and finally Rav Eliezer calls on Heaven to prove he is correct. A Bas Kol announced: "What do you have with Rav Eliezer, that the Halocho is according to him in many places?"

Rav Yehoshua jumped to his feet and said "It (i.e. the Torah) is not in heaven!" When Rav Nosson encountered Eliyohu Hanovi after that incident, he asked the prophet what Hashem was doing during that time, and he replied: "He was smiling and saying 'my children have defeated me, my children have defeated me!'"

We can find Moshe arguing with Hashem (Berochos 9b, 32a) and "winning" the arguments. It's worth bearing in mind that it is illogical to imagine Hashem being wrong. There is simply no way of understanding such a concept, since He has seen every side to every argument before the argument has been made. He knows the answer to every question, and He has created every question. So what does the Talmud mean by such incidents?

At the simplest level, it serves to reinforce this concept of built-in fallibility to the human condition. Hashem does not want anyone to imagine that they can be absolutely correct about anything at any time. **אחרי רבים להטות** simply means that we are inclined to follow the majority. This is not certitude.

Sadly the lack of space precludes the further analysis of this sedrah, which is replete with concepts and indicators of our socio-political and economic systems. However, a brief conclusion is in order.

What the upshot of all this is that the Torah's political system is not a dictatorship, a theocracy, socialist, communist, democratic or any other type of governance. It is, in fact, a very balanced blend of so many elements.

The freedom of speech, which actually does not really exist unfettered in any political system is taken as granted in the Torah system. One may disagree with our leaders, and we frequently were on record as doing so.

The will of the people, not by voting, but by consultation (a far more laborious and more effective method than voting) regarding the appointment of their leaders, allowed for smoother and more experienced governance, with long term planning.

There was in fact a very careful balance of powers between the various elements of the government and leadership, to ensure that no individual could rise up and create a dictatorship.

But above all this, we have to step back and consider the following. 3,300 years ago, the only daily concern of the nations surrounding Eretz Yisroel was: what's for breakfast, what's the entertainment tonight, who are we invading tomorrow? That, and the occasional sacrifice to propitiate some angry god was really all it was all about.

Yet we – 3,300 years ago, while the whole of Europe were wearing bearskins and living in mud huts or caves and painted their faces blue – we had a legislature and a sophisticated political system that actually outranks anything we have today in its efficiency, fairness and accountability. Three millennia ago! The freedoms and norms that we enjoy today were extant then, uniquely within our political system, whether it was the right to privacy, women's rights, property rights, environmental rights or the right to give your leaders a right old yelling. Three millennia ago!

This, if nothing else, should make us marvel in awe at the sheer, unadulterated and infinite genius that is the Torah.