

## A Taste of Torah - Nourishment in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

### Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei: Elevating Gold into Holiness When Does Spiritual Hunger Become Nourishment?

#### Why Does the Search for Spiritual Ecstasy Require the Vessels of Torah?

I have always been starving for spirituality. I remember how, in my younger years, I sometimes felt almost swept up by the energy of dancing wildly at music festivals. There was something undeniably powerful in the pulsating rhythm and the endless ecstatic movement. A deep sense of connection flowed through the crowd as we danced together on the moist, sweet-smelling grass that cradled our bare feet. In those moments, it felt as though something divine was close, as if the music and movement opened a doorway to a higher state of awareness.

Even today, from my bedroom window, I occasionally hear trance music pulsing through the hills from midnight until six in the morning. Its relentless rhythm reminds me of that earlier search for spirituality through expanded consciousness and uninhibited expression of passion. I admit that there is something exhilarating about dancing yourself into a frenzy and entering a trance-like state. The body becomes light, the mind loosens its grip, and the heart feels swept into a powerful current of collective emotion.

Yet over time, I have come to recognize the underlying danger in such experiences. Unbounded spiritual excitement, when it is not guided by Torah, easily turns into illusion. In this sense, those frenzied dances around amplifiers and speakers mirror the ancient dancing around the Golden Calf. The people were not merely rebelling; they were searching for a tangible spiritual experience when the hiddenness of the true G-d felt unbearable. Their desire for transcendence was real, but without the vessels of Torah, it collapsed into idolatry.

Today, I understand that raw spiritual energy is not the problem. The longing itself is holy. Yet such powerful forces must be channeled and contained. Just as the Mishkan gathered scattered passion and transformed it into sacred service, the mitzvot provide vessels that allow spiritual energy to nourish rather than consume us. Ecstasy without boundaries may feel intoxicating for a moment, but only within the framework of Torah can our deepest hunger for connection be truly satisfied. What once erupted into wild, unbounded frenzy can become elevated into a sustained, nourishing closeness to Hashem.

#### How Can Gold Become Either a Vehicle for Sin or a Vessel for Repair?

One of the deepest lessons about nourishment in the Torah is that what we consume or offer can either elevate the soul or dull it. Eating itself can become an act of holiness that draws us closer to Hashem, or it can descend into indulgence that numbs our spiritual awareness. The same principle applies not only to food but to all material blessings that sustain our lives. The Torah highlights this transformation through the very same gold that had recently been used to create the Golden Calf. That gold reflected a moment when the people sought immediate gratification rather than patiently trusting Hashem. Thus, the people rushed to surrender their ornaments for a distorted vision of holiness: "All the people stripped themselves of the golden rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aharon" (*Shemot* 32:3). From that gold emerged an image that reduced the Infinite to something visible, graspable, and controllable.

Yet only a short while later, the Israelites rectified their misuse of gold by offering that very same material to build the Mishkan, a dwelling place for the Divine Presence. The Torah describes how they now came forward willingly, each moved by the generosity of heart:

**ספר שמות פרק לה פסוק כב** וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים עַל הַנָּשִׁים כָּל נְדִיב לֵב הֵבִיאוּ חָח וְנֶזֶם וְטַבַּעַת וְכוּמָז כָּל כְּלֵי זָהָב וְכָל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְּיָדוֹ תְּנוּפֶת זָהָב לַיהוָה:

"Men and women came, everyone whose heart was generous; they brought brooches, nose rings, rings,

ornaments – all kinds of gold objects; every person who raised an offering of gold to Hashem” (*Shemot* 35:22).

The contrast is deliberate. At the calf, the gold was torn off in haste and spiritual panic. In the Mishkan, the gold was offered from the generosity of heart – measured, directed, and aligned with the Divine command. For this reason, the Torah later calls the sanctuary the “Tabernacle of Testimony” because its very existence testified that Hashem had forgiven Israel for the sin of the calf by allowing His Presence to dwell among them (Rashi, *Shemot* 38:21). The Tabernacle of Testimony thus bears witness that the gold of the Mishkan came to atone for the gold with which the calf was made. What had once been hijacked for estrangement was now reclaimed for closeness. As the Midrash explains, Hashem brings healing to the very wound Israel created: “For I will bring healing to you, and I will heal you of your wounds” (*Yirmiyahu* 30:17; *Midrash Tanchuma, Teruma* 8).

The Torah thus teaches a profound principle: the very same material can become either a vehicle for sin or a vessel for repair. Our intentions and the way we direct them determine whether something elevates or degrades us. The same substance that can feed the ego can be transformed into a vessel for holiness when it is offered with humility and generosity.

### **How Did the Mishkan Engender a New Creation After the Collapse of the Calf?**

The Shelah HaKadosh explains that the world was created for the sake of Adam, and when Adam sinned, he damaged not only himself but all the worlds along with him. The revelation at Sinai brought repair, but that restoration was spoiled again through the sin of the calf. Afterward, however, the Mishkan became a form of all the worlds and an indication of a new creation. This idea sheds powerful light on *Vayakhel-Pekudei*. The Mishkan is not merely a sacred structure built after a national disaster. It is the Torah’s blueprint for rebuilding reality itself. The seven days of the inauguration correspond to the repair of the seven days of Creation, and the eighth day becomes like the dawn of a recreated world. This is why the *parashiyot* are so detailed. Every beam, clasp, socket, and garment matters because the Mishkan is not merely a decorative building; it is cosmic reordering. Aharon and his sons’ holy garments replace Adam’s fallen garments of skin, hinting back to the lost garments of light. Sin had clothed humanity in concealment, but the Mishkan reintroduces garments “for honor and for beauty” (*Shemot* 28:2), signaling the restoration of true human dignity (Shelah HaKodesh, *Parashat Vayikra*). In this light, the donations to the Mishkan were not simply fundraising. They were participating in re-creation. Each contribution became part of a world being rebuilt after rupture. This is why the Torah lingers over the craftsmanship with such loving precision: holiness after sin is not abstract. It must be patiently fashioned, detail by detail, until a shattered world can once again become a vessel for the light.

Where the calf represented a collapse into illusion, the Mishkan represents a return to Divine form, restoring the world’s proper channel of nourishment. Creation itself is Hashem’s original act of sustaining the world, continuously feeding all existence with life and blessing. Through the sin of the calf, Israel damaged that flow, turning material abundance away from its holy purpose. The Mishkan came to restore Hashem’s original creation, reestablishing a reality in which the Divine Presence could once again dwell below, and from that Presence blessing and sustenance filled the rectified world.

### **How Do We Learn that the Real Tikkun of the Golden Calf is Inner Alignment?**

At the opening of *Parashat Vayakhel*, Moshe gathers the entire people and immediately commands them about Shabbat before speaking of the Mishkan: “These are the things that Hashem commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, and on the seventh day it shall be holy for you” (*Shemot* 35:1-2). The two central mitzvot that stand out here as repair for the Golden Calf are Shabbat and the building of the Mishkan. Both are weighty enough to counter the root of that sin, which was tantamount to a breach of the entire Torah.

Shabbat restores the proper rhythm of creation in the realm of time by teaching that the world is not ours to seize and manipulate. The Mishkan restores sacred space by clarifying that holiness is invited through obedience, humility, and collective offering – not through self-generated religious excitement. This teaches us the importance of *vayakhel* itself – the gathering. Wherever Torah speaks of assembling a congregation, it hints at the gathering and elevation of scattered sparks of holiness. The calf was born from fragmentation, frenzy, and mob panic; the Mishkan emerges from holy gathering, ordered generosity, and shared purpose (*Petach HaOhel, Parashat Vayakhel*).

Rav Natan of Breslev similarly explains that after the terrible fall, Moshe stood firm, prayed with fierce persistence, and drew the people back from the power of the *sitra achra* (other [impure] side). Only then could the work of the Mishkan – the House of Prayer – begin. Thus, the true antidote to the calf is not merely correct ritual. It is the slow reeducation of desire. It is learning again how to gather, how to pause, how to channel fervor, and how to let passion submit itself to form through restored closeness. Shabbat teaches us not to overreach. The Mishkan instructs us how to bring our energy into proper vessels. Together, they heal the misdirected spiritual hunger that led the people to demand an immediate, tangible god when they no longer could endure the hiddenness of the true One (*Likutei Halachot, Beit HaKnesset* 6).

### **How Can We Elevate Our Fallen Wealth, Imagination, and Passion?**

The calf was not only a misuse of gold but also a misuse of imaginative and emotional power. Rav Natan of Breslev explains that idolatry is fueled by a confused and fallen faculty of imagination. When the higher spiritual colors hidden within gold and silver are not illuminated properly, imagination distorts them and turns them toward false worship. The tikkun therefore came through the donations to the Mishkan: “gold, silver, and copper, and blue, and purple, and scarlet...” (*Shemot* 35:5–6). These materials reveal the holy colors once again, drawing beauty back under the authority of the Divine word. What had been swallowed by illusion is returned to sacred form. When wealth is weighed, measured, and given toward holiness, it becomes holy boldness rather than rebellious audacity (*Likutei Halachot, Hilchot Avodat Elilim, Halacha* 3:5). This insight carries an especially relevant lesson for avodat Hashem. The problem is not that we burn with longing, imagination, or intensity. These forces themselves are gifts from Hashem. The danger arises only when they run ahead of vessels. There must always be a balance between drawing near and returning, between passion and restraint. Uncontained light shatters. The Mishkan, therefore, becomes the answer not only to idolatry but also to excess spirituality. It teaches that even the desire to come close to Hashem must be guided within the boundaries of the vessels He established.

When wealth is offered as tzedakah, when thought is redirected from confusion to Torah, when imagination is clothed in holy form, and when longing is channeled into vessels rather than allowed to break their bounds, the very powers that once produced the calf become the materials of redemption. Through the Mishkan – the House of Prayer – fallen imagination is purified and restored to holiness (*Likutei Halachot, Beit HaKnesset* 6). The same abundance that once fed illusion can now nourish holiness. Then gold no longer glitters as temptation but shines as testimony that what fell the furthest can also be raised the highest.

*Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin: Holistic Torah for Women on the Land is for women who seek to delve deeply into their souls through intensive textual study and creative expression. We engage women of all ages and nationalities in intense Torah study and sustainable living. Drawing on creativity and life experience, students participate in art & drama workshops, authentic movement, and organic gardening, and take turns cooking wholesome meals for each other. Our Holistic Torah involves connecting to Torah of the land, to our Creator, and to personal growth. Dormitory facilities are available in the peaceful, rural setting of Bat Ayin, nestled in the Judean Hills and located just 20 minutes south of Jerusalem.*