

**Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei:
On Uncertainty**
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B'nei Yisrael depart *Har Sinai*, with the trauma of the *chayt ha'egel* still fresh in their minds. As they begin their journey, they are uncertain about their relationship with God, their leader, and are heading to a land that is strange and unknown.

It is in this state of uncertainty that *B'nei Yisrael* begins the process of building the *mishkan* (tabernacle)—a vessel, I believe that is a physical embodiment of the people's emotional and psychological state of uncertainty.

At first glance, this is surprising. The *mishkan* is built to make God's presence known in this world. It is meant as an antidote to the uncertainty that the people felt after they erected the *egel*— to give us a sense of security and certainty. And yet, the tabernacle is an impermanent structure, its very essence conveys uncertainty. It was built and taken apart as the Jewish people moved. As they encamped in one place, it would be assembled. When they were ready to move on, the *mishkan* would be disassembled.

To make assembly and disassembly more seamless, the *mishkan's* walls and vessels could be taken apart, with one key exception. As our *pasrah* describes, as the tabernacle is about to be erected, Moses placed the *edut* (testimony) in the *ahron* (ark), and then placed the *badim* (poles) on the *ahron*. It is these poles that are used to carry around the ark, which houses the *luchot*.

But, in parshat Truma, an extra command regarding these *badim* is asserted:

The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. (Shemot 25:13-15) בְּטִבְעַת הָאָרֶן יִהְיוּ הַבַּדִּים לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ:
(שמות כה:יג-טו)

If the *mishkan* is meant to be transient, why can't the poles that carry the ark be taken apart as well?

The author of the *Sefer Hachinuch* depicts the veil of uncertainty that existed in the lives of the people in the *midbar* (desert). He writes: "We are commanded not to remove the poles of the ark from it, lest we might need to go forth with the ark out to some place in haste, and in the hurry of the moment forget to examine whether the poles are properly secured and, God forbid, the ark might slip from our hold" (Mitzvah 96).

The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that the poles must not be removed lest the Jewish people have to leave their current encampment in a hurry. The future, for the community, at this point, is entirely uncertain, and therefore, they must be poised, at a moment's notice, to move. The *badim* must remain attached to the ark.

However, there is an alternative way to understand the necessity of keeping the *badim* attached.

The Gemara (Yoma 72a) teaches that even though the poles were firmly attached to the *ahron*, with effort they could be loosened and removed. Although we are not supposed to, it is possible to remove the poles. Perhaps, the *badim* unearth the idea of possibility. That one day, the *badim* that carry the ark, will no longer be an essential component, as the ark will eventually find its final destination, negating the necessity to suddenly arise and move with it.

Uncertainty, in some cases, may lead to mayhem. To despondency. And yet, uncertainty gives us space to make room for hope--for something better.

The ethic of the *mishkan* is one of human creativity and possibility. The Jewish people, were builders of the *mishkan*, inherently invested and involved in its comings and goings. The fact that the *badim* could be removed, (despite the fact that we are commanded not to) actually implies that uncertainty can be transformed into possibility.

The entire *ahron*, the guardian of the *luchot*, embodies this notion of possibility and hope. The *kruvim*, the two angelic figures towering above the *ahron* were fashioned with their wings outstretched. The outstretched wings of the *kruvim* signify flight and mobility, an invitation to begin a journey and soar. Of being open to the possibility of climbing even higher. Uncertainty, is really a double edged sword— it describes the burden of the unknown, coupled with the prayer that the unknown will perhaps, bring with it change, hope and something better.

It could even be argued that uncertainty is essential to religious faith. Rabbi Herzl Hefter, based on the teachings of Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner (1800-1854), coined the phrase “[The Theological Uncertainty Principle](#),” where he posits that “uncertainty is an essential part of the God created spiritual topography which we inhabit. It is precisely in the landscape of uncertainty where we develop as religious beings.”

The notion that certainty is equivalent to being more religious, is no longer true. It is the reality of uncertainty that forces us to develop and grow. Everyone struggles with uncertainty, be it global, religious, or personal and with uncertainty, comes hope. It is hope that allows us to keep moving forward, day in and day out.



Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Co-Founder and President of Maharat, the first institution to ordain Orthodox women as clergy, also serves on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. Rabba Hurwitz completed Drisha's three-year Scholars Circle Program, an advanced intensive program of study for Jewish women training to become scholars, educators and community leaders. After another five years of study under the auspices of Rabbi Avi Weiss, she was ordained by Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber in 2009. In 2013 Rabba Hurwitz was awarded the Hadassah Foundation Bernice S. Tannenbaum prize, and the Myrtle Wreath Award from the Southern New Jersey Region of Hadassah in 2014. In 2016 she was the Trailblazer Award Recipient at UJA Federation of New York. She was named as one of Jewish Week's 36 Under 36, the Forward50 most influential Jewish leaders, and Newsweek's 50 most influential rabbis. In 2017 Rabba Hurwitz was chosen to be a member of the inaugural class of Wexner Foundation Field Fellows.