



Mitzvos Are Not Just for Sinners

Why is the story of the Tabernacle our of order? And what does it say about "sinners" who need to repent in synagogue?

Do It Right

In the late 60's, the Rebbe came out with his Tefillin campaign. Dozens of Chabad Yeshiva students roamed Manhattan and offered Jewish passerby's the opportunity to put on Tefillin. Many in the orthodox Jewish world were appalled by the idea of stopping someone in the street and having him put on Tefillin. The right way to don Tefillin is to wash your hands and recite the morning blessings in preparation.

Putting on Tefillin while jogging down the street – unheard of!

Out of Order

As you read the Torah you find that surprisingly there are often times that events are not recorded in chronological order.

For example, at the end of Parshas Noach we read that, "Terach (Abraham's father) died in Haran." However, the very first event in Lech Lecha is, "And G-d told Abraham, 'Leave your land, birthplace, father's home and travel where I tell you,'" to paraphrase the text. Truthfully, Abraham left home sixty years before Terach died.

It is on that verse that Rashi explains, "These events are purposely not written in the order that they transpired so that no one might say,

‘Abraham didn’t honor his father, abandoning him in his old age.’” Although it is true that Abraham left his father, don’t forget that it was a special exemption commanded by G-d. The Torah still doesn’t broadcast it, lest some misguided folks misinterpret the story and use it as an excuse to deposit their aging parents in old age homes and retire to Florida.

Indeed, the Midrash tells us that Abraham worried about this himself. “The Supernal Name of Heaven will be desecrated through my leaving my father to fend for himself in his old age.” G-d then assured him, “I hereby relieve you of man’s obligation to honor his parents and your leaving will be recorded only after your father’s passing away.”

Similarly, the Torah tells the story of Isaac’s passing before relating the story of the sale of Josef. Josef was actually sold twelve years prior to Isaac’s passing away. This time Rashi teaches a rule that applies to the entire Torah, “The Torah is not written in chronological order.” It happens quite often that the order of events as they are recorded in Torah is not necessarily the order in which they transpired.

Don’t Wait

Well, we’ve got the same problem in our Parsha, Teruma. The Parsha describes how G-d instructs Moses in the construction of the Tabernacle, the Mishkan. This discussion continues next week, in Parshas Tetzaveh. And then comes the story of the Golden Calf.

According to Rashi, the most basic commentator, it is clear that the instructions to build a temple were issued only after the sin of the golden calf as an atonement.

Why then does the Torah record them prior to the sin?

As a rabbi, people have often approached me with suggestions about whom I should invite to services and whom I should approach for donations. “This guy really needs to do a mitzvah,” they say. “He has

done so many wrongs he could use a little dose of righteousness.”

It seems to be the attitude that only one who's committed evil in his life has need for prayer and good deeds, to affect redemption. The average people, it would seem, don't have to try so hard when comes to doing mitzvos as they have nothing to atone for.

Though the gold used in the Mishkan did, in fact, atone for the golden calf, if the Torah had recorded the events as they happened, with G-d commanding the Jewish people to build the tabernacle after the sin of the golden calf, it would seem that the Mishkan's sole function was atonement for a sinful people. Instead, Torah records the instructions before the sin to teach us that the Jew's obligation to build a dwelling place for G-d is not only for those who have sinned against Him, but for all Jews alike.

The construction of the Mishkan teaches us that it is our mission to take the physical world and use every part that we encounter in the service of G-d. This is essentially every Jew's purpose. We all have to gather mitzvos. Even the greatest Tzaddik who has never committed a sin in his life must create a Mishkan.

This is why you can ask a Jew to put on Tefillin when he has done nothing in preparation because Torah is not locked into sequences. “Torah is not in chronological order.” When a Jew is on his way back to Judaism he must grab every mitzvah that comes his way regardless of whether he's following the traditional sequence or not.