

Sermonette 1: You never know when a Mishkan simile comes your way

Just days before Rosh HaShanah, a leader of Israel died. Shimon Peres was the last of the founding fathers of the modern Israeli state to die. Throughout this evening, members of the congregation will share some of his most easily located sayings. These are merely a sampling of his wisdom. In addition, after some of the statements by him, I have occasionally added other texts from our tradition which also have a bearing upon Yom Kippur.

I would ask those of you who come up to share quotations to let us all know the source of your quotation.

You know when civilization began? With the invention of the mirror. Shimon Peres

He made the laver of copper and its copper stand from the mirrors of the women who gathered at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” (Exodus chapter 38 verse 8)
The Israelite women possessed mirrors of copper into which they used to look when they adorned themselves. Even these did they not hesitate to bring as a contribution towards the Tabernacle. Now Moses was about to reject them since they were made to pander to their vanity, but the Holy One said to him, “Accept them; these are dearer to Me than all the other contributions, because through them the women caused the birth of those huge hosts in Egypt!” For when their husbands were tired through the crushing labor they used to bring them food and drink and induced them to eat. Then they would take the mirrors, and each gazed at herself in her mirror together with her husband, saying endearingly to him, “See, I am handsomer than you!” Thus they awakened their husbands’ affection and subsequently became the mothers of many children, at it is said, (**Song of Songs 8:5**) “I awakened thy love under the apple-tree”, (referring to the fields where the men worked). (Rashi)

You may know that the items mentioned in the text were really mirrors (and that the word does not mean visions, or appearance, etc.), for it is said, (v. 29) “And the copper of the wave-offering was seventy talents etc. ... and therewith he made [the sockets etc.]” — the laver, however, and its base are not mentioned there amongst the articles made from that copper; hence you may learn that the copper of which the laver

was made was not a part of the copper of the weave-offering, which is the only copper mentioned as having been contributed by the people. Thus did R. Tanchuma explain the term. And so does Onkelos also render it in the sense of mirrors in old French, for we find that for the word in Isaiah 3:23 which means mirrors, Onkelos uses the same word he uses here. (Rashi)

For me, dreaming is simply being pragmatic. Shimon Peres

And Moses said to the Israelites: See, the LORD has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft (Exodus 35:30-31)

I think peace should be done not only among governments but among people. It was impossible before the Facebook. Shimon Peres

“There are two things that cannot be achieved in life unless you close your eyes a little bit. And that's love and peace. If you want perfection you won't obtain either of them.” Shimon Peres

Hillel said that a person should be like Aaron the Kohen, loving peace, chasing after peace, loving created beings (that is, fellow human beings) and bringing them closer to the Torah. (Pirkei Avot 1:12)

How did Aaron accomplish this? He would politely greet all he came across in the course of a day, even those people known to have behaved improperly. The next time that person thought of doing something inappropriate, they would think of Aaron, and remark to themselves, “How can I do something like this and not be too embarrassed to look Aaron in the eye the next time he says hello?” (Pirkei d’Rabbi Natan chapter 12) What else did Aaron do? If he saw two friends who were no longer talking with each other, he would go to one of them and say, “Do you know what your friend is talking about? He is beating his breast and tearing his clothes out of shame over what he has done to you! He is too ashamed to approach you and admit he was wrong.” The conversation would continue until the friend decided that he could understand where his friend was coming from, and was willing to approach him instead. Then Aaron quickly ran to the other friend and repeated the same words, receiving the same result. Thus the two returned to their usual selves and relationship. (Pirkei d’Rabbi Natan chapter 12)

From my earliest youth, I have known that while one is obliged to plan with care the stages of one's journey, one is entitled to dream, and keep dreaming, of its destination. Shimon Peres

I read when I get up in the morning, when I can during the day and every single evening. Most of my weekends are spent reading great books. Books are my constant companions. If you eat three times a day you'll be fed. But if you read three times a day you'll be wise. Shimon Peres

You can kill a thousand; you can bring an end to life; you cannot kill an idea. Shimon Peres

On Yom Kippur, we remember what it was like in the Temple. I think it was interesting that a number of the sayings from many different specific

moments in Shimon Peres' life which had nothing to do with Yom Kippur or the Temple originally, could each be tied into either the day or the building.

What about the last three statements, following which I did not have a further quotation? I have an idea which ties them all together: We use the Machzor to guide us in this 25 hour journey towards a closer relationship with God. Some of the ideas in the Machzor are also in the Siddur, which is traditionally used three times a day. One other truth that both the Siddur and Machzor share – from the time long ago when there was only one in each community, through the ages when each person brought their own, and down through the present day when they are often supplied by the congregation, the physical book often wore out physically before the user was done using it. The burial or other less reverential destruction of the siddur or machzor did not mean the end of the ideas contained within it.