

Parshat Vayakhel
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In the beginning there was only one phone; only one phone in each home. And God saw that it was good so he made the phones fruitful and they multiplied – then there was a phone at home and one at work – and God created extensions and second and third lines so that there were many phones at home and many phones at work – there was a phone in the kitchen and in the living room and in the bedroom and yea if thou was very fortunate there was a phone in the bathroom – and there was line one and line two and maybe even line three. And then God created wireless phones – so we could take our phone from room to room and yea even unto the deck and whilst we were grilling outside or sitting by the pool there was a phone. And then God created mobile phones so we could have phones with us at all times – phones in our cars and then yea the phones became so small and so portable with such good batteries that we could carry them on our person and never be out of reach. And as the phones multiplied so did our telephone numbers – we had a home number and a work number and a fax number and a cell number and then there is your wife’s cell number and your kids cell numbers – so yea the numbers increased till they filled the earth with numbers – and we were vexed by the number of numbers – and we cried out unto the Lord and God saw our vexation and heard our cry which rose up to him by reason of our drowning in numberness and so He created a new number to end all numbers and we praised the Lord by reason of our salvation for He had sent unto us an answer to our prayers.

It is called GrandCentral.com and God wrote about it in the Circuits Section of the New York Times just this past week. There I discovered a new solution that is being billed as: “one number for life.” You choose a single, unified phone number – you hand it to everyone you know, instructing them to delete all your old numbers from their Rolodexes and then from now on whenever somebody dials your new unnumber, all your phones ring simultaneously. No longer will it matter if your at home or at work or on the road – no longer will people have to track you down by dialing each of your numbers in turn – no your new GrandCentral phone number will find you. Is this the salvation that it promises – who knows, but this is the perfect week to speak about technology. About the place that technology plays in our modern world. The torah states in today’s *parasha: Lo t’va-aruysh b’chol moshvoteychem* "Do not light a fire in any of your habitations on the Sabbath day." (Exodus 35:3) And while we have come a long way from the days when fire was our major technological invention – the issue of technology and the management of technology remains a challenge for us in 2007 no less then it did for our ancestors in the wilderness of Sinai. *Lo t’va-aruysh b’chol moshvoteychem* "Do not light a fire in any of your habitations on the Sabbath day."

For most of us sitting in this Sanctuary this morning technology has not been much of a problem – in fact most of us have not given the matter much thought, it has just been a natural and wonderful part of our lives - we have embraced it without question as a boon to mankind. I remember the first time I took my family to Disney World down in Florida and we visited GE’s Carousel of Progress exhibit in Tomorrowland. How many of you remember that exhibit? It deals with one family going through the years and it demonstrates how that same family had progressed and benefited as a result of the technological innovations that had enriched their lives. And in the background, behind it all,

there is an upbeat song the lyrics of which were: "There is a great big beautiful tomorrow..." And well, for me and I suspect for most of you - that has more or less been my take on this technology thing. To recall a time when so much effort went into cleaning clothes and dishes and the house - when getting from one place to another was such an effort, when communication was a matter of days and weeks not seconds - how could the technology that made all these conveniences be anything less than wonderful?

Yet, as we have learned over the last few years, - there are significant segments in our world who view this technology as, "the problem." Those who flew airplanes into the World Trade Center and those who blow up subways in London have a very different worldview than we do. They see technology as: "what's wrong with the world"; They have rejected our technological world - they live in the mountains of Afghanistan in pre-modern conditions and they view us Americans as the enemy because we are seen as the chief proponents of technology. We are viewed as "the enemy" because we have allied ourselves with the forces of progress. Unlike us, they do not see "a great big beautiful tomorrow..."

For many years we just assumed that we were indeed on a carousel of progress, that we Americans were leading a parade that everyone wanted to join. We marched through the 50's, the 60's the 70's and 80's, the band playing, and we just assumed that everyone would jump on - who wouldn't want to be a part of it? We were reinforced in our assumptions as we saw McDonald's Golden Arches sprout up from Beijing to Jerusalem - and studies that demonstrated that the single most recognized symbol in the world was -- Coca Cola. Pax Americanus was taking over the world - and indeed the Cold War was not so much a battle over the virtues of technology as much as a battle as to who would be the leader in the world of technology. When the Russians placed Sputnik into orbit - we were stunned. We had just assumed that this technology thing was an American monopoly. But as the Cold War raged - no one questioned that supremacy in technology would result in world supremacy - that was a given.

But all that changed with the rise of fundamentalism - especially radical Islamic fundamentalism - which challenged, and continues to challenge, the very basis of the technological revolution. The image of Osama Bin Laden hiding in the caves of Afghanistan - represents the very antithesis of all that we have been working towards for the last century. The fact that Islamic terrorists used our own technology to defeat us - turning modern jet airplanes into a poor man's missile - and aiming it at the World Trade Center - the symbol of technology triumphant - those gleaming twin towers reaching toward the sky - which symbolized everything New York and by extension everything America had achieved - and now they are gone - Gone! Is there any act more symbolic than that? They have declared war - not only on America but on what America stands for - on progress.

The reason that Israel is so reviled by so many Arab countries is that it is seen as an outpost of America in the Middle East. It is an "in their face" representation of all that the fundamentalists have come to oppose. Israel embraced modernity, Israel jumped on the bandwagon of progress and in 50 years transformed itself into an island of innovation in a sea of despair. Arab leaders were faced with two options - modernize or terrorize - and to our great misfortune and the world's great misfortune too many of them chose the latter. These Islamic Fundamentalists read their Koran in such a way as

to oppose all that the modern world has come to represent.

But wait a minute, isn't our Bible just as regressive? We sit here on Shabbat - a day that prohibits the lighting of fire, prohibits the use of technology. Jews observe Shabbat by not using their cars, not using electricity, not participating in commerce and manufacturing. And if Shabbat is the model to which we aspire all week long - isn't the underlying message as reactionary as those Islamic Fundamentalists who would have us all live in caves, not listen to music and have women dress in burkas?

Let us look a little closer at today's torah portion. Yes, it does open with the words I quoted at the outset: *Lo t'va-arv eysh b'chol moshvoteychem* "Do not light a fire in any of your habitations on the Sabbath day." But look where that verse is placed! It is placed in *Vayakheyl-Pekuday*, in a section of the torah that describes the detailed building of the *mishkan*, a tabernacle, a portable tent which the Israelites carried with them through the desert.

The tent was handcrafted; it used all the technological advancements that were available to them at the time: fire and sewing and metallurgy and so forth. Rabbinic tradition sees a parallel between the Israelites building the *mishkan*, the tabernacle and God's original building of the world. The same Hebrew words are used in the description of both. Creation was the ultimate divine technological feat of its time and building the tabernacle was the ultimate human technological feat of its day and age. Humans imitated God as creators. The *mishkan*, the tabernacle became a paradigm for human ingenuity and creativity.

In the Bible, fire is the symbol of creative power. After all, light was the first thing God created. How does God feel about our technological prowess, of our using fire? To the ancient Greeks, technology was the realm of the gods. When Prometheus stole the fire, he was trespassing on property not permitted to him. Fire, and by extension, all technology, was not for humans. Play with fire and you WILL get burnt.

The Biblical view is very different. Fire is given to us humans to use. We are encouraged to use our technological prowess, to create and build, to imitate God in making things for this world. We are encouraged to create for six days a week. Once a week, on Shabbat, we are instructed to leave fire alone, we remember where it came from; Shabbat is a time to remind ourselves that we are not God. In the very torah portion that focuses on the building of the *mishkan*, that spends most of its time speaking of the greatest technological feat of the time - there is included an injunction to limit our embrace of technology, to manage our infatuation with technology so that we master it and it does not master us.

To refrain from lighting fires for one day a week becomes an expression of self-control and perspective. We are being taught not to reject technology - we are counseled how to master it.

Shabbat in particular and Jewish religion in general becomes the mechanism by which we are encouraged to move forward in a world of technology and at the same time not lose sight of our values and priorities. In today's Torah portion it is as if the Bible recognized the potential and the danger inherent in progress and sought to define a course that would enable us to both embrace the

potential and protect ourselves from the danger. Technological innovation and Shabbat observance became the formula for human success. Tradition and change became the model we Jews accepted.

Osamah bin Laden would have us reject modernity and move back into caves. I respond by embracing modernity for six days a week and then by observing Shabbat. I observe Shabbat not as a rejection of modernity or a declaration of the evil of technology. I observe Shabbat as a reminder of the limits of modernity and the boundaries of technological achievement. Osamah bin Laden would have us choose: technology *or* tradition. My Bible and my religion would have us embrace both as God's will - and the challenge is to live a life of perspective between what was and what needs to be.

Who would have ever thought that the Carousel of Progress would be under attack? We had believed that ours was a generation that was privileged to participate on one big fantastic ride towards the future. That the whole world was one big Disney World. But, since September 11 we have been reminded that not everyone shares our view of the world. There is a "great big beautiful tomorrow" - as the song tried to teach us - but we may have to fight for that tomorrow in ways we never anticipated - in the mountains of Afghanistan and in the streets of Jerusalem. And the vision of that tomorrow as expressed in our sacred tradition is one that needs to be voiced now more than ever, it is one that needs to be nurtured now more than ever. So, don't call me on my cell phone today - it's Shabbat, and I won't answer. But tomorrow you can reach me at 516....