

We are, at our core, **a religion of the little man or women for whom one half a shekel is a lot of money, and needs to know that their contribution, little or large, is making a difference.** On the month before Rosh HaShana, we emphasize our need for personal growth; Rosh HaShana celebrates the creation of the first human being. But Nisan and Pesach and the Book of Shemot all celebrate the creation of a free, independent Jewish people, and here, too, our Torah tells us that the community needs remember that the only way we will be able to grow as a group is if we pay attention to each individual, helping them contribute in their own unique way, and if we value that contribution. **If every individual feels that they are respected and welcomed by the community, that our community needs their contribution even if it is different and unusual,** then we will be able to enter the new national year, beginning with Nissan, and leave the Book of Shemot, with the confidence that **as a people we can fulfill the destiny God gave us.**

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ET LIDROSH

בס"ד, גליון 43

Parshat Pekudei- Shekalim Appreciating the Little Guy Rabbi Asher Lopatin

It is astounding that the book of the Torah that describes the Exodus from Egypt, the Revelation at Sinai and the *mishkan*, Hashem's dwelling place amongst B'nei Yisrael ends with an accounting of the seemingly banal details of who gave what to make every detail of the Sanctuary. **Perhaps "God is in the details", yet Pekudei is neither about detailed laws nor even detailed plans for the Sanctuary: It is about confirming that our money was well spent!** This year Parshat Pekudei is read on Shabbat Shekalim, when we read from Ki Tisa how the half shekel was taken from every Israelite male, over 20, to be used "for the work of the Tent of Meeting (the Sanctuary)". So we begin Adar Sheni, the run-up to the glorious month of Nisan and the holiday of Pesach, knowing the mundane details of how the funds for the *Mikdash* were raised and how they were spent. And while Moshe's financial records are impeccable, the Haftara tells us that Yehoyada's needed a serious audit.

Yet far from surprising, the Parsha and Shabbat Shekalim are both making a fundamental statement about Judaism: **We are not just the religion of glorious miracles and divine revelation.**

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Good Intentions Are Not Good Enough

I once asked a member of our Congregation if he would attend our weekday morning minyan and become part of our growing "minyan team". He responded: "I would love to attend minyan, but I am not able to do so since I must be at my office early in the morning. **With the Lord's help, I'll join the minyan in the future**".

Some years later, when I learned that this gentleman had just retired from his work, I called him again, inviting him to attend our weekday morning minyan. He answered: "For all these years, I've had to wake up early to go to my office. Now that I'm retired, I can finally sleep late. So I'm not able to attend morning minyan now, **but with the Lord's help, I'll join the minyan in the future**".

This gentleman thought that "with the Lord's help" he would one day attend minyan. That day never came. The man passed away years later, without ever having made it to our minyan even once .

In "The Heart of Man," Erich Fromm wrote that "most people fail in the art of living not because they are inherently bad or so without will that they cannot live a better life; they fail because they do not wake up and see when they stand at a fork in the road and have to decide ".

We all may have good intentions; but we also have the uncanny ability to come up with rationalizations why we cannot fulfill these good intentions. We find excuses justifying why we can't attend minyan, or can't contribute more to charity, or can't spend time learning Torah, or can't find more time to spend with our families, or can't invite guests to our homes etc. We fail, not because we are bad, but because we don't take control of our lives, we don't have the will-power to make decisions and to act on them. We drift along in our routines, hoping that "with the Lord's help" we'll change our patterns for the better in the future .

This week's Parasha brings us to the end of the book of Shemot. It is customary in many congregations for congregants to call out at the conclusion of Pekudei: "Hazak hazak venithazek." Be strong, and let us strengthen ourselves. Some congregations add the phrase: hizku veyaaamets levavhem kol hamyahalim laShem: be strong and let your heart have courage, all you who hope in the Lord. This is a way of celebrating the completion of a book of the Torah, and encouraging us to continue in the path of Torah study so we may complete other books as well .

I think that a phrase from the above-quoted text can be interpreted as follows: hizku--strengthen yourselves, be resolute; ve- ye-ametz levavhem--and God will give courage to your hearts. First, you need to strengthen yourselves, make decisions and start to take action. Then, God will give you the added fortitude to fulfill your goals. We need to take the initiative; we need to demonstrate resolution; we need to assume responsibility. If we strengthen ourselves, we may trust that the Almighty will give us added strength .

If people fail in life because they don't realize they are at a fork in the road and must make a decision, they succeed in life because they do realize that they must take responsibility and must act--and they do!

Using Public Funds

How many of us have 'borrowed' and envelope at work? Have you ever taken something from work, with the intention of paying for it, but never actually got round to paying because nobody will notice?

This year Pekudei stands as a parsha in its own right and this gives us an opportunity to stress the unique lesson of Pekudei. **This week we read the phrase "כֹּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה" – "as Hashem commanded Moshe" no less than fourteen times yet the phrase never appears in Parshat Vayakhel.** Why is this so?

Pekudei opens with an audit which is reported in the middle of the building process. We are informed how much gold, silver and brass have been used. It makes more sense to give us this information at the beginning or at the end of the building process.

The order of events was as follows: Shmot 35:5 records the request made of the people to give a donation to the building fund. As the donations began rolling in, Bezalel and his team realized an amazing truth – they had more than enough money than they needed (all shuls dream). At this point Moshe instructed Bnei Yisrael that the target and beyond had been reached. Once all the vessels had been completed, at the end of Vayakhel, and before the preparation of the Priestly garments, at the beginning of Pekudei, the list of donations appears. This could not have happened at the outset as the donations were still being collected. However, once enough donations had been collected a great challenge faced the architects and builders. Would they stick to the original plans or would they expand as they now had more money? Would anyone notice if some of the money disappeared?

Pekudei stresses that after all the monies had been collected and when it was clear that there was more than enough **money that the builders were stringent with there use of public funds –‘as was commanded by Moshe’. There was a necessity and obligation on Moshe and the builders to build as commanded out of a reverence for public funds. This message of the mishkan and public funds still rings true today.**