

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LEVI COOPER

World of the Sages

Last Wednesday, Jews around the world began a new cycle of Daf Yomi - the daily study of a double-sided page of a Talmud - with the goal of finishing the entire work in seven years. In line with the dream of the innovator of Daf Yomi, Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933), participants everywhere study the same text, which begins with the discussion of the appropriate times to read Shema.

Shema is the centerpiece of the morning and evening prayers, and is comprised of a number of verses from the Torah. It is made up of three paragraphs, and opens with the well known verse: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Shema focuses on our relationship with God, the tradition, the commandments and the Land of Israel. Why does the record of the Oral Law begin with the discussion pertaining to Shema? Shema is not the first prayer recited in the morning, nor can it truly be classified under Berachot (Blessings), the first tractate. Furthermore, Tractate Berachot begins the first order of Mishna - Zeraim, which deals with agricultural laws; Shema can hardly be included in this section, much less form its opening discussion. Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (1713-1793), better known by the title of responsa Noda Bihuda, offers a number of explanations for the placement of Shema. Originally from Poland and later serving in the rabbinate in Prague, the Noda Bihuda answered questions from all over Europe. In addition to his responsa, the Noda Bihuda also authored an important supplement to the Shulhan Aruch entitled "Dagul Meirevava." He published his novellae on the Talmud under the title "Tziyun L'Nefesh Haya," or more commonly known by the acronym "Tzlah." It is at the beginning of this work that the Noda Bihuda tackles our question.

The Noda Bihuda begins by quoting Maimonides, who suggests that since Shema is recited twice daily, this frequency justifies its place of pride. The Noda Bihuda notes that if this is indeed the criterion, then the Amida prayer, which is recited thrice daily, would be a better candidate to open the Talmud, rather than being discussed later in the tractate. A second possibility focuses on the order of the prayers. Perhaps Shema is discussed first since both in the morning and evening prayers it precedes the Amida. This approach

falters, in light of the minority opinion that Shema precedes the Amida only in the morning prayer, while in the evening prayer the Amida precedes Shema. Granted, this opinion is not the halachic norm and, in practice, Shema always precedes the Amida, yet the Noda Bihuda is working under the understanding that an explanation that takes into account all opinions, even those that are not normative, is certainly preferable.

THE SEARCH for a universally acceptable explanation is a classic Talmudic approach to problem solving.

The Noda Bihuda suggests a parallel between the first Mishna and the first commandment at Sinai as another reason for beginning with Shema. Before giving the Torah to the Jewish people, God presents his credentials - "I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt..." Therefore, at the outset of the human record of the Oral Torah, we respond by discussing Shema, thereby acknowledging that God is indeed our ruler. A further explanation highlights the legal category of the commandment to read Shema. Reading Shema is a commandment of Torah origin and hence appropriately precedes the discussion of the Amida, which is an obligation later instituted by the Sages. However, this explanation too, cannot be accepted by all, since according to one sage, the reading of Shema is also of rabbinic origin, the same legal category as reciting the Amida. The Torah origins of Shema lead the Noda Bihuda to entertain an explanation that focuses on belief, since the dichotomy between the Written Law and the Oral Law may lead some to consider a dualistic God. To negate this perspective, the Mishna opens with Shema - a statement of God's unity. Shema thus forms a bridge between the Oral and Written Laws, indicating that both corpora have one common origin.

I would suggest a slight variation on this theme: Over the generations the veracity of the Oral Law and the authority of its mediators have been questioned. Some have doubted the Sages and the traditions they have borne, while affirming the weight of the Written Law. The Mishna opens by discussing Shema, a passage from the Written Law, to highlight the tight bonds between the oral tradition and the accepted written tradition. Focusing on the content of Shema leads to other possible approaches: The paragraph of Shema includes the injunction to propagate the tradition through education and learning. "And you will teach them to your children, and you will talk of them..." The Noda Bihuda suggests that this passage elevates the

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relative importance of the Oral Law, a tradition passed from generation to generation.

Perhaps the most satisfying approach implied by the Noda Bihuda considers the place of Shema in Jewish practice and collective memory. Shema is traditionally a statement of faith, to the extent that in many synagogues it is proclaimed at the conclusion of a heartfelt Yom Kippur. Additionally, over the generations, Jewish martyrs have followed the example set by Rabbi Akiva and recited Shema with their last breath. In the first verse of Shema we proclaim the unity of God, and when reciting this verse we accept upon ourselves the Kingdom of Heaven. From a halachic perspective, reciting this verse without meditating on its meaning renders the recitation invalid.

Asserting our relationship with God may be seen as a prerequisite for discussing the many issues raised in the corpus of the Oral Law. Before thanking God for granting us abundance, before humbly placing our requests before God, before plumbing the depths and details of our rituals and before exploring the divine in our civil code, this special relationship between the Jewish people and God must be affirmed. *The writer is director of Advanced Programs at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, teaches at Midreshet Lindenbaum and is a rabbi in Tzur Hadassah. © 1995-2005 The Jerusalem Post - <http://www.jpost.com/>*

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Yitzchok Schochet, Mill Hill Synagogue

With the portion of Pekudei we conclude the book of Shemot. Reflecting on the many episodes since their exodus it is evident the Israelites were a difficult people-labelled by G-d Himself as a stubborn nation. Time and again they seem to be having problems and the burden of their troubles rested firmly on Moses' shoulders.

In life, we often struggle with problems of different sorts. But how many of the problems we face are really insurmountable and deserve the excessive time, energy and worry spent on them? Human nature has a peculiar way of making every little molehill look like a mountain.

Perhaps this is the significance of a peculiar passage we find at the conclusion of the portion: "And Moses was unable to come into the sanctuary for the cloud hovered above it."

The commentators observe that Moses was like a household member in G-d's home. Nevertheless the cloud of glory determined his entry into the sanctuary. If it was hovering overhead, he was unable to enter. When it was lifted he could then go in. How come Moses had restricted passage? Surely a household member has constant access enabling him to come and go as he pleases?

What is quite apparent from the whole book of Shemot and beyond is how Moses turns to G-d every time he is confronted with a problem. Each time he is faced with an awkward people in emotional turmoil he seeks G-d's guidance. He never seems to try and resolve the difficulties on his own. The Jewish people, by extension, experiencing this, were typically always turning to him with their problems, without ever trying to work out the issues on their own.

But G-d has no problems, only plans. Thus Moses, much like the rest of us, had to learn that not every problem is really as difficult as it may at first appear. By restricting Moses' access, G-d is in effect teaching him how to look at the broader picture, reflect upon the predicament in context and deal with it himself. In so doing, he could demonstrate the same to the Jewish people as well.

The truth is that every problem is really a possibility in disguise, and that our problems should make us better, not bitter. Sometimes we even have to be thankful for our problems. If they would be less difficult, someone with less ability would have our job.

The problems we are to solve depend on our diligence, faith and conviction. To heave an anxious sigh of concern and shrug our shoulders in despair is to terminate the search for solution and to abandon the hidden opportunities, which may well lie hidden beneath. © 2005 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The second book of the Torah concludes at the end of this week's portion. As the final words are recited, the assembled call out hazak, hazak, venithazek, be strong, be strong and may we be strengthened. Indeed, we say these words when completing each of the Five Books of Moses.

Most interpret these words to speak first to the individual, and then to the collective whole. Hazak is a singular term. When uttered twice it creates a sense of community. Hence, ve-nithazek - together we will gain greater strength and prevail.

However, if we examine the end of Genesis and Exodus, the first two places where we actually utter this phrase, a deeper understanding emerges. Genesis concludes with Joseph's death. Exodus comes to a conclusion with the cloud of glory resting upon the newly finished Tabernacle.

A common thread can be seen. Both books conclude with endeavors left unfinished-left to be concluded by the next generation. When Joseph dies, slavery is about to begin-fulfillment of the covenant with our ancestors, in the form of redemption, comes many years later. Similarly the Exodus narrative ends with the Tabernacle just constructed, but the fulfillment of the use of the Tabernacle has not yet taken place. Not only has it not been used, but it serves as a blueprint for the ultimate House of God, the Holy Temple built many years later.

Note that the three other places where hazak is recited fall into the same pattern. Leviticus and Numbers end with laws of tithing and inheritance. Those laws are given, although they can only fully become a reality after possessing land in Israel, which occurs later. And, of course, Deuteronomy concludes with the death of Moshe. The irony of his life is that the greatest leader of our people never realized his greatest dream, to enter the land of Israel - a mission only to be achieved by those he left behind.

An important lesson emerges. Often, in life, we think that there is nothing we cannot accomplish. The culmination of each book teaches us-no. No one leaves the world fulfilling all of their dreams, all of their hopes and expectations. In the words of Rabbi Tarfon, it is not for any of us to complete the task. (Avot 2:21)

The story is told of an elderly man who plants a carob tree. "Foolish man," a passerby proclaimed, "why do you waste your time? Surely, you will not live long enough to see the tree produce." The old man sighed and responded, "My father planted trees for me and I, in turn, must plant trees for my children."

Notwithstanding that no one can fully complete the task, Rabbi Tarfon adds that we are not free from doing our share, from embarking on our goals with our utmost energy and strength. This in fact, may be the deeper meaning of the refrain: first we proclaim hazak-be strong, be strong, let us each make sure to do our share, knowing all along that we will not complete every goal.

But then, we call out together, ve-nithazek, may we be strengthened in the recognition that together, our task be concluded, even if it takes generations to make it a reality.

With this in mind, I suggest that this week, and every other occasion that we complete a book of the

Torah, we take a moment of pause to recognize that as we surround the Torah, that we appreciate the gifts of the generations that proceeded us. At the same time, we should hold our children close in the prayer that they continue the mission of our people and Torah. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

To what extent is the prosperity of an individual a function of that individual's hard work and clever planning or is it rather a direct result of the graciousness (or lack thereof) of the Almighty? The great talmudic sage of the Land of Israel in the third century of the Common Era, Rabbi Yohanan, teaches, "There are 3 keys solely in the hands of the Holy One Blessed be He, which were never handed over to an agent: the key to the rains-the major cause, and therefore the symbol of produce and prosperity-the key to childbearing and the key to the resurrection of the dead." (B.T. Taanit 2A) From this passage it seems clear that financial status, children and redemption are dependent on G-d's will rather than on human diligence and intelligence.

A fascinating commentary of Rashi upon a verse in this week's torah reading of Pekudei adds an important element to the words of Rabbi Yohanan. At the conclusion of the execution of the finished Sanctuary and all of its accruements, the Bible declares, "And they brought the Sanctuary to Moses with a tent and all of its vessels... the animal skins used for coverings... the Ark.... the Table... the Pure Menorah..... the golden Altar.... the Copper Altar...." (Exodus 39:36-42). Rashi, citing the Midrash Tanhuma, interprets, "And they brought the Sanctuary in its entirety to Moses because they were not able to properly erect it. Since Moses had not performed any action at all in the execution of the Sanctuary until this point, the Holy One Blessed Be He left for him the task of erecting since no other individual had been able to do so due to the weight of the beams which no one had the strength to cause to stand upright. Moses succeeded in erecting it. Said Moses to the Holy One Blessed Be He, 'How is it possible for such a structure to be erected by human effort?' He said to him, 'You must occupy yourself by doing the work; it will appear as if you are the one causing it to be erected, but the fact is that it will stand up by itself.'" (Rashi ad loc)

If in effect it was G-d who was erecting the Sanctuary, then why did the Israelites bring it to Moses at all? The apparent message seems to be that it is the way of the world for G-d to operate via human agents; hence, in all areas of life it is necessary that we humans put out the effort (what many Jewish theologians like Rav Dessler refer to as hishtadlut). Although we must understand that in the final analysis whatever happens only happens because G-d willed it to happen.

On the basis of an interpretation of Maimonides, I would like to suggest a very different spin on the words of this Midrashic commentary as well as a very different philosophy regarding human involvement in the world. The Rabbis of the Talmud teach us that there were three things which were done by King Hezekiah for which he was praised by the Sages and three things for which he was not praised by them, with his having put a certain "Book of Healings" out of circulation being one of the actions for which he was praised (B.T. Pesachim 56A). Maimonides, in his "Commentaries on the Mishnah" (Pesachim, end of Chapter 4) informs us in uncharacteristic detail that this "Book of Healings" was related to idolatry and completely ineffective. The great philosopher and legal codifier goes on to explain why he was so verbose in his description of the contents of the book.

"It is because I heard... that King Solomon was reported to have authored this Book of Healings which, when an individual would become sick he would turn to that book, act in accordance with its advice, and become cured of his illness. And when King Hezekiah saw that individuals had stopped relying upon the Lord may He be praised (but were instead relying on the book), he removed the book and took it out of circulation."

Maimonides himself then turns to the reader with his own words, which are (once again, uncharacteristically) filled with invective. "And you must now understand the weakness of this statement, how there is within it a touch of madness and to what extent it is impossible to imagine that Hezekiah would have anything to do with such foolishness or that his devotees would praise him regarding such a fool hearted and ill advised action. Would you then suggest that were a hungry individual to acquire a piece of bread and eat it, an activity which would undoubtedly cure him of the terrible illness of hunger, that he would not thereafter rely upon G-d to whom he would give thanks for having provided him with the food which had removed his discomfort."

Strangely enough, the commentator who suggests that King Solomon was the author of the Book of Healings was none other than Rashi in his Talmudic interpretation (ad loc) Maimonides himself insists that the only justification for taking the book out of circulation was its idolatrous nature. For Maimonides it is incumbent upon every individual to work in his field as effectively as he can, and it is especially incumbent upon doctors of healing to save as many lives as possible through the medicines or through the cures that they prescribe as a result of their knowledge and insight. The patient who is cured however must always remember to thank not only the doctor but also-and perhaps even especially the Almighty G-d who initially implanted the wisdom within the mind of the great healer to have come up with the proper medicines. From Maimonides perspective, it is the way of the world

that human beings must maximize their knowledge and their will to produce the best results. Indeed, G-d operates within the world through His human creations and the intelligence with which He has endowed them. In the case of the Sanctuary, it was Moses, his superior will-and therefore concomitant strength-which erected the Sanctuary and understood precisely how G-d wanted it to be. This does not take away one iota of our reverence for the Divine. After all, it was the Almighty who created a soul like that of Moses our teacher, having endowed him with the ability to be the greatest prophet and leader in Jewish history. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**hese are the accountings of the Mishkan (Tabernacle)- the Mishkan of Testimony" (Shemos 38:21). Why is it called the "Mishkan of Testimony?" What exactly does it testify to, or about? If we examine the other places where the description of "testimony" is used, the answer should be obvious. The Tablets that the "10 Commandments" were carved into are referred to as "The Tablets of Testimony" (31:18, 32:15 and 34:29). Later in our Parsha, when Moshe "put the Testimony into the Ark" (40:20), Rashi tells us that this "Testimony" was the Tablets. The Torah often refers to the Ark as the "Ark of Testimony," because the "Testimony" was placed in them (see Rashi on Shemos 31:7 and Vayikra 24:3). It would follow, then, that the Mishkan as a whole would be called the "Mishkan of Testimony" because its focal point was the "Testimony" (the Tablets) that were within the Ark inside its structure. And, in fact, Rashi explains the words "the Mishkan, for a tent of the Testimony" (Bamidbar 9:15) to mean "the Mishkan, which was made to be a tent for the Tablets of the Testimony." Yet, on the opening verse in our Parsha, Rashi explains it otherwise.

The "Mishkan of Testimony," Rashi tells us, was so called because it was "a testimony to [the nation of] Israel that G-d had pardoned them regarding the incident of the [golden] calf, for He caused His Divine Presence to dwell between them." The first question is why Rashi chose this explanation rather than one consistent with the other "testimony" references? The second question, posed by most of the commentators on Rashi, is why he considered the Mishkan as the "proof" that G-d had forgiven them; wasn't the very fact that G-d gave Moshe the second set of Tablets to replace the first set- which were broken because of the sin of the golden calf- proof enough that G-d had forgiven them?

Midrash Tanchuma (2), upon which Rashi seems to be based, precedes its explanation(s) of why it was called the "Mishkan of Testimony" with a lengthy comparison between the creation of heaven and earth and the building of the Mishkan, ending with its approach that "just as heaven and earth give testimony

regarding [the nation of] Israel (referring to the warning about the consequences of not following the Torah, described in Devarim 30:19) so too does the Mishkan give testimony regarding Israel," as we see from our verse. What this testimony is about is not explained, but the Midrash later continues with a second explanation, that it is a testimony directed not at Israel, but "to all the [other] nations that G-d accepted [the repentance of the Children of Israel] regarding the incident of the [golden] calf. Whether the only difference is to whom the testimony is meant or if it is also regarding what that testimony is about remains unclear.

Before giving this second possibility for the "testimony" reference, the Midrash concludes its first approach by adding that the word "Mishkan" is mentioned in our verse twice to allude to the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem, which were used as "collateral." Rashi brings this part of the Midrash too, adding that it was collateral for the sins of [the people of] Israel. It would seem, then, that even though Rashi appears to be bringing two separate explanations on two different parts of the verse (first as to why the word "Mishkan" is mentioned twice and then what "Mishkan of Testimony" means), it is really one continuous thought, as we shall see.

After bringing the second possibility for what the "Testimony" is about, the Midrash brings a third approach, very similar to its first one. It explains that the "testimony" is a warning to the nation that if they don't keep the Torah, the first two Temples will be destroyed. Since this is presented as a different approach than the first, we can deduce that the "testimony" in the first is not a warning about (only) the Temples in Jerusalem, even though- if it is to be compared to the testimony in Devarim- it also testifies about the consequences of not following the Torah.

Rashi on Shemos 25:16 alludes to the notion that the Torah (and the Tablets) are a testimony to the relationship between G-d and the Nation of Israel. The "10 Commandments" being given at a public revelation testifies to this relationship, as does the covenant itself. This relationship was severely strained after the sin of the golden calf, but repaired thanks to Moshe's prayer and the repentance that followed. The fact that G-d commanded us to build a Sanctuary for His Divine Presence to be felt among us, and that He gave us a second set of Tablets, are both testimony that the relationship was restored. If the relationship were to become strained again, i.e. we sinned, the result would be an end to the manifestation of that relationship- the closeness represented by His Divine Presence being among us; i.e. the destruction of His Temple.

When getting to the final stages of the building of the Mishkan, we are warned that if we stray again, the Mishkan itself- and any Temple that followed it- would be destroyed. This may be how the first approach of the Midrash differs from the third, in that it includes, or specifically refers to, the possibility of the currently

being constructed Mishkan being destroyed if they sin again (whereas the third refers only to the Temples). In the context that we are being warned that the consequence of sinning is the destruction of the manifestation of our relationship with G-d, the fact that G-d commanded us to build the Mishkan in the first place- and then actually "dwelled" in it- testifies that the damage done by the golden calf had been reversed. Not that this is the "only" proof that it was reversed, as the giving of the second set of Tablets could also testify to the renewed relationship. But as long as the Divine Presence was dwelling in the Mishkan, we knew that the relationship was still intact.

Rashi explains our verse as a warning about the possible destruction of the Mishkan and the Temples, and therefore explains the testimony referred to by the "Mishkan of Testimony" as a testimony *to* us, not *about* us (to the other nations). Within this framework, the aspect of our relationship with G-d that Rashi feels is being conveyed is not the covenant itself, but the manifestation evidenced by the "Divine Cloud of Glory" that rested on the Mishkan. ©2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI NOACH WITTY

Tayvas Noach

I intend that this column will, with God's help and as the title implies, deal with individual words in the parshiyos. That said, Adar is the month in which the unpredictable occurs. I hope to bring to the reader's attention issues that will ultimately result in either greater understanding of chumash or a more accurate and therefore more beautiful krias HaTorah, or both.

The name of this week's parsha is PHEKUDEI, not "Pekudei." (Go ahead: check your chumash!) The general grammatical rule is the following. There are six letters that may take a dagesh kal, i.e. a dot inserted in the letter to change the sound of the consonant. These letters are: bais, gimmel, daled, kaf, pai, and tav. (Their acronym may be pronounced "BeGeD-KeFeS.") Ashkenazic pronunciation only changes four of those letters. There are several rules pursuant to which these consonants either require the dagesh kal or lose it, rendering the sound "softer."

One of the circumstances under which the dagesh kal is absent from BeGeD-KeFeS is if the word beginning with BeGeD-KeFeS is preceded by a word that ends in either aleph, haih, vav, or yud. (The acronyms in Hebrew that have been suggested are "Yaihu," who was one of the Kings of Israel, or "Ehevi" or "Ahoi," which are merely the letters in their order of appearance in the Aleph-Bais. The vowelization of the last suggestion matches that of the name of HaShem as it is commonly pronounced.) The common denominator of these letters is that their sound is very soft or aspirated or even silent.

In TaNaCH, a co-requirement for these soft letters to cancel the dagesh kal from the initial consonant of the following word is that the trop (cantillation or musical note for Torah reading) be a mesharais, a "serving" sound, rather than a royal, i.e. dominant, trop, usually called a melekh or kaisar.

Now to the application of the rules: "Aileh" ends with the letter "haih," and carries the "munakh" trop, which is a serving trop. Consequently, the word following it, which begins with the letter "peh," has no dagesh kal. The word is "Phekudei."

Parshas Tetzaveh at Shemos 28:7, ends with the words "EL shenai ketzosav VE-chubar." This is part of the command dealing with the ephod, the apron-like garment of the cochain gadol. With variations, the phrase appears in this week's parsha at Shemos 39:4. Here it is written "AL shenai ketzosav chubar." 1) "El" is now "al"; 2) the word "ketzosav" is spelled with a redundant-but unpronounced-vav in the middle, but without the yud that is present in Parshas Tetzaveh; and 3) there is no conjunctive "vav" as a prefix to the last word.

The careful ba'al korei will let his audience know that he is aware of these differences and pause (as he ought to anyway according to the trop) between the last two words in order to mark the absence of the conjunctive vav and not inadvertently borrow the final vav of "ketzosav" for the last word of the verse. At least in Ashkenazic congregations, the pronunciation of "ketzosav" remains the same. Besides the tense of the verse, here is a fourth (actually the first) curious difference between the two verses. I leave that for the reader to discover.

The contemporary Mesorah chumash notes that there is no word gematriya for the total number of verses in the parsha as is presented for most other weekly Torah portions, except for the chumash that contains the commentary of the Malbim. The Malbim's Chumash equates the total of 92 verses to the word "aitzai." (aleph-tzaddi-aleph). What has this to do with Parshas Phekudei?

The word "aitzai" is found in Shemos 11:8, following the plague of darkness. In an exchange rife with drama, Par'o offers to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, even the children, except for the cattle and sheep. Moshe replies that indeed the Egyptians themselves will offer the Israelites cattle and sheep for their sacrifices to HaShem as well as their own livestock that will accompany them. Par'o's heart is hardened and he banishes Moshe from the palace, threatening him with death should he see him again.

Then and there, Moshe receives a prophecy and informs Par'o of the tenth plague of the death of the firstborn, that there will be a wailing in Egypt the likes of which had never been heard nor ever will be, that even the dogs will be silent as to the Israelites, that Par'o's servants themselves will come and bow down to Moshe and beg him to leave with the entirety of the people.

"After all that," says Moshe, "then will I leave." "Ve-acharei khein AITZAI." What better word with which to mark the conclusion of the Book of . . . Exodus!

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After the description of the work involved in building the Tabernacle, Moshe was commanded to construct it and place the holy utensils inside. With respect to some of the utensils—the Table and the Menorah—Moshe was commanded to perform the corresponding rituals: "Bring the Table and place its setting on it, and bring the Menorah and light its lamps" [Shemot 40:4]. On the other hand, the command for the Altar of the incense is limited:

"Put the golden altar for the incense in front of the Ark of Testimony" [40:5]. This implies that Moshe was not told to do anything with this altar except to put it in its place.

Further on in this chapter we are told about the observance of the mitzvot. There, we see that Moshe performs the rituals as he has been commanded to do: "And he placed the Table... And he arranged the loaves of bread... And he placed the Menorah... and he lit the lamps before G-d just as G-d had commanded Moshe" [40:22-25]. However, surprisingly, Moshe also takes action with respect to the altar of the incense: "And he placed the golden altar in the Tent of Meeting, before the curtain. And he offered the incense on it." [40:26-27], even ending with the phrase, "just as G-d had commanded Moshe"! This is indeed perplexing, since Moshe was never given a command to light the incense on the altar.

The Ramban explains that Moshe understood by himself that he should burn the incense, in view of the commands that he was given with respect to the Table and the Menorah. But this still leaves us with a question of why the command was not explicitly given with respect to the altar, as opposed to the many details that the Torah gives at great length with respect to the building of the Tabernacle.

Evidently there is indeed a difference between Moshe's actions with respect to the Table and the Menorah as compared to what he did with the altar of the incense. As we have explained in earlier articles, the functions of the Table and the Menorah are different in substance from the task of the Altar of the Incense, about which Bnei Yisrael were commanded only at the end of the Torah portion of Tetzaveh. The Table and the Menorah were part of the essence of building a "house of G-d," as symbolic expressions of the appearance of the Shechina, while the purpose of the golden altar was to represent Bnei Yisrael in the house, and to make it possible for the High Priest to atone for

the sins of Bnei Yisrael as a major factor in the atonement of the nation.

Based on this principle, we can answer the questions we asked above. The commands that were given to Moshe in this week's portion are linked to the appearance of the Shechina, as described at the end of the portion. In order for this to happen it was necessary to put the loaves on the Table and to light the lamps of the Menorah. However, burning the incense on the altar was not an essential part of the revelation of the Shechina. The very opposite was true, the appearance of the Shechina had to take place without any "help" from the people. When Nadav and Avihu tried to "help along" the revelation of the Shechina by bringing their own flame, they were punished (see Vayikra 10:1). On the other hand, it was right for Moshe to light the incense, not as part of the revelation of the Shechina but because he was "the first priest who performed any ritual, and he therefore was first to burn the incense" [Ramban]. Thus, the direct commands that were given with respect to the Table and the Menorah were related to a unique type of activity- the creation of a home where the Shechina can appear. The command that was described with respect to the golden altar ("just as G-d had commanded Moshe") refers to another level, the initial performance of all the rituals in the Tabernacle. This was done by Moshe, the "first priest."

The Reason for the Half Shekel

by Rabbi Shai Freundlich, Head of Torah Mitzion Kollel, Montevideo, Uruguay

This week we read the first of the four special Torah portions before Pesach, the portion of "Shekalim". Here is what is written in the Mishna Berura: "The sages decreed that between the beginning of the months of Adar and Nissan we read four special portions in memory of specific items. The first is Shekalim, in memory of the half a Shekel that everybody was obligated to donate to the Temple to pay for the daily Tamid sacrifices." [Orach Chaim 685]. Why do we read Shekalim in the month of Adar? The Mishna Berura quotes from the sages that we have been commanded to bring public sacrifices from new donations starting with the beginning of Nissan. Therefore, one month before this, "the need for Shekalim is announced," so that the people will make their donations before Nissan. Thus, the reason for reading the special portion of Shekalim in the month of Adar is connected to the day-to-day operation of the Temple.

On the other hand, it is written in the Talmud, "Reish Lakish said: It was clear to the One who Created the Universe that Haman would offer to pay Shekalim in order to harm Yisrael, therefore the Almighty preceded Haman's money with His own. And that is the reason that we have been taught, on the first of Adar the need for Shekalim is proclaimed." [Megilla 13b]. According to Reish Lakish, there is a link between Haman's

Shekalim and the half Shekel collected from Bnei Yisrael; the special portion of Shekalim is thus linked to Purim.

Actually, it seems that both of these reasons are based on the same principle. In the portion of Ki Tissa, in the command about donating half a Shekel, it is written: "And let each man give an atonement for his soul... and there will not be a plague when they are counted" [Shemot 30:12]. This is a mitzva that establishes the proper method of taking a census, since counting the people directly is forbidden because "counting is under the control of the Evil Eye" [Rashi]. The nature of a census is to count individuals and add the numbers together to represent the group as a whole. If people are counted one at a time, the Evil Eye will take control, since no one person is perfect, and some bad traits can be found in everybody. The solution is to donate half a Shekel. Everybody gives half a coin, and the complete value is only achieved when all of the people have participated in equal amounts. Unity is not a result of individuals who are complete in themselves but rather stems from the fact that every person complements all the others.

The contribution of half a Shekel was used to make the support beams of the Tabernacle, as noted by Rashi: "'Take the money of atonement from Bnei Yisrael and use it for the work of the Tent of Meeting' [Shemot 30:16] --

This refers to the beams that were made from it." The foundations that supported the Tabernacle were made from the donations of half a Shekel, and they filled the need for a memory and for atonement for Bnei Yisrael.

Thus, the public sacrifices, which were purchased from the Shekalim donated by Bnei Yisrael, are an expression of the principle of unity. Everybody by himself is no more than half, never a complete whole. But this is also our response to Haman, who claimed that "there is one nation that is distributed and dispersed among the other nations" [Esther 3:8], and therefore decided to "destroy, kill, and annihilate" [3:13] us all. We are not distributed and dispersed-by virtue of the half Shekel, we are united.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah, read in conjunction with Parshas Sh'kalim, deals with the collection of funds for the Bais Hamikdash. Before King Yehoash's reign, the Bais Hamikdash was seriously neglected and much repair work was necessary to restore it to its original splendor. When the righteous King Yehoash came into power he immediately instructed the kohanim to collect the necessary funds. After their unsuccessful attempt in achieving this goal he personally spearheaded the collection and received an overwhelming response.

The reason for this terrible neglect is explained in Divrei Hayomim (2:23) wherein the wicked Queen Atalya and her sons are blamed for the deteriorated condition of the Bais Hamikdash. The royal family severely mistreated the holiest structure in the world by carelessly roaming inside it, bringing much damage to its interior walls and structure. Although the Jewish people consistently donated funds to repair the Bais Hamikdash the wicked sovereign repeatedly misappropriated them. Instead of using them for the Bais Hamikdash she channeled them to further her idolatrous practices. After the pious Yehoash came to power he removed idolatry from the royal family and faithfully applied the collected funds to their intended usage. After many years of neglect the Bais Hamikdash was finally restored to its previous glory.

The pattern in this haftorah is reminiscent of the Jewish people's formative stages as a nation. This week's maftir reading alludes to the Jewish people's comeback after abusing their financial resources, resulting in their most shameful plunge in history. (see Daas Z'kainim S'hmos 30:13). Moments before the Jewish people miraculously left Egypt Hashem rewarded them with abundant wealth. Hashem effected a change of heart in the ruthless Egyptian slave drivers and they generously showered the Jewish people with gifts and wealth. However, the Jewish people did not properly appreciate Hashem's unbelievable favor and became influenced by their newly gained wealth and power. During very trying and desperate moments their newly gained sense of control heavily influenced them. Instead of turning to Hashem for assistance they applied their wealth and golden ornaments towards securing their own destiny and produced the Golden Calf. Hashem severely responded to this grave offense and the Jewish people sincerely repented to Hashem. Hashem then granted them opportunity to rectify their sin by inviting them to participate in the erection of the Mishkan. They learned their lesson well and generously applied their money to a most appropriate cause, the construction of Hashem's magnificent sanctuary. Hashem recognized their new approach to wealth and its potential good and deemed them worthy of His Divine Presence for the next thousand years.

The reading of Parshas Sh'kalim and its accompanying haftorah are a most befitting introduction to our month of Adar. We read in Megillas Esther (3:9), that the wicked Haman offered the king an impressive ten thousand silver blocks in attempt to purchase the Jewish people from the wicked King Achashveirosh. Haman intended to use his wealth to influence the king to grant him permission to destroy the entire Jewish nation. However, Chazal teach us that Haman's efforts were preempted by the the Jewish people's annual donation during the month of Adar to the Bais Hamikdash. By no coincidence, Hashem instructed the Jewish people to annually donate this exact sum- ten thousand silver blocks-to His treasury for sacrifices in

the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "Let the Jewish nation's sacrificial donation of ten thousand blocks preempt Haman's attempt to influence the king with his ten thousand blocks" (see Mesichta Megilla 13b).

The meaning of this seems to be that the Jewish people's annual donation demonstrated their proper understanding of wealth and its power. They allocated their wealth to the most worthy of causes and eagerly donated annually-without fail-ten thousand blocks of silver to Hashem and the Bais Hamikdash. This perfect approach to wealth and its positive values protected them from Haman's financial influence on the king. The Jewish people understood the true value of wealth and were not personally influenced by its potential ills. Therefore, they were not subject to Haman's financial influence and his powerful seductive approach to the king could not determine their fate. Eventually, the king would and did see through Haman's madness for power and all Haman's power and financial influence were of no avail. © 2005 Rabbi D. Sigel & www.torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“**T**hese are the reckonings of Ha'mishkan / the Tabernacle, the Mishkan of Ha'edut / the Testimony, which were reckoned at Moshe's bidding..." (38:21)

Rabbeinu Bachya z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: The gematria of "Ha'mishkan" together with the five letters of that word equals 420, the number of years that our Sages say the Second Temple stood.

The gematria of "Mishkan" equals 410, the number of years that the First Temple stood. The gematria of "Ha'edut" equals 479, the number of years that the Mishkan stood. [We read in Sefer Melachim that the First Temple was built 480 years after the Exodus. The Mishkan was dedicated one year after the Exodus.]

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (the Chatam Sofer; died 1840) asks: Why are the 420 years of the second Bet Hamikdash alluded to by a word whose gematria is only 415, such that we must add the five letters of the word to arrive at the total? He answers: The Gemara (Yoma 52b) relates that five elements of the First Temple were missing in the Second Temple. (For example, the Aron Ha'kodesh was missing.) These are alluded to by the value "five" that is missing from the above gematria. (Torat Moshe)

