

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

What do you do when your people have just made a Golden Calf, run riot, and lost their sense of ethical and spiritual direction? How do you restore moral order -- not just then in the days of Moses, but even now? The answer lies in the first word of today's parsha: Vayakhel. But to understand this, we have to retrace two journeys that were among the most fateful in the modern world.

The story begins in the year 1831 when two young men, both in their twenties -- one from England, the other from France -- set out on voyages of discovery that would change both of them, and eventually our collective understanding of the world. The Englishman was Charles Darwin. The Frenchman was Alexis de Tocqueville. Darwin's journey aboard the Beagle took him eventually to the Galapagos Islands where he began to think about the origin and evolution of species. Tocqueville's journey was to investigate a phenomenon that became the title of his book: Democracy in America.

Although the two men were studying completely different things, the one zoology and biology, the other politics and sociology, as we will see, they came to strikingly similar conclusions -- the same conclusion God taught Moses after the episode of the Golden Calf.

Darwin, as we know, made a series of discoveries that led him to the theory known as natural selection. Species compete for scarce resources and only the best-adapted survive. The same, he believed, was true of humans. But this left him with serious problem: If evolution is the struggle to survive, if the strong win and the weak go to the wall, then all ruthlessness should prevail. But this is not the case. All societies value altruism. People esteem those who make sacrifices for the sake of others. This, in Darwinian terms, doesn't seem to make sense at all, and he knew it.

The bravest, most sacrificial people, he wrote in *The Descent of Man* "would on average perish in larger number than other men." A noble man "would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature." It seems scarcely possible, he wrote, that virtue "could be increased through natural selection, that is, by survival of the fittest." (pp. 158-84.)

It was Darwin's greatness that he saw the answer, even though it contradicted his general thesis. Natural selection operates at the level of the individual. It is as individual men and women that we pass on our genes to the next generation. But civilisation works at the level of the group.

As he put it: "A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection."

How to get from the individual to the group was, he said, "at present much too difficult to be solved." (Ibid., p. 166)

The conclusion was clear even though biologists to this day still argue about the mechanisms involved. We survive as groups. One person versus one lion: lion wins. Ten people against one lion: the lion may lose. Homo sapiens, in terms of strength and speed, is a poor player when ranked against the outliers in the animal kingdom. But human beings have unique skills when it comes to creating and sustaining groups. We have language: we can communicate. We have culture: we can pass on our discoveries to future generations. Humans form larger and more flexible groups than any other species, while at the same time leaving room for individuality. We are not ants in a colony or bees in a hive. Humans are the community-creating animal. (This is the argument between E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins. See Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, New York: Liveright, 2012. And the review by Richard Dawkins in *Prospect Magazine*, June 2012.)

Meanwhile in America, Alexis de Tocqueville, like Darwin, faced a major intellectual problem he felt driven to solve. His problem, as a Frenchman, was to try to understand the role of religion in democratic



America. He knew that the United States had voted to separate religion from power by way of the First Amendment, the separation of church and state. So religion in America had no power. He assumed that it had no influence either. What he discovered was precisely the opposite: "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." (Democracy in America, I:314)

This did not make any sense to him at all, and he asked various Americans to explain it to him. They all gave him essentially the same answer. Religion in America (we are speaking of the early 1830s, remember) does not get involved in politics. He asked clergymen why not. Again they were unanimous in their answer. Politics is divisive. Therefore if religion were to become involved in politics, it too would be divisive. That is why religion stayed away from party political issues.

Tocqueville paid close attention to what religion actually did in America, and he came to some fascinating conclusions. It strengthened marriage, and he believed that strong marriages were essential to free societies. He wrote: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." (Ibid., I:340)

It also led people to form communities around places of worship. It encouraged people in those communities to act together for the sake of the common good. The great danger in a democracy, said Tocqueville, is individualism. People come to care about themselves, not about others. As for the others, the danger is that people will leave their welfare to the government, a process that ends in the loss of liberty as the State takes on more and more of the responsibility for society as a whole.

What protects Americans against these twin dangers, he said, is the fact that, encouraged by their religious convictions, they form associations, charities, voluntary organisations, what in Judaism we call chevrot. At first bewildered, and then charmed, Tocqueville noted how quickly Americans formed local groups to deal with the problems in their lives. He called this the "art of association," and said about it that it was "the apprenticeship of liberty."

All of this was the opposite of what he knew of France, where religion in the form of the Catholic Church had much power but little influence. In France, he said: "I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country." (Ibid., I:319)

So religion safeguarded the "habits of the heart" essential to maintaining democratic freedom. It sanctified marriage and the home. It guarded public morals. It led people to work together in localities to

solve problems themselves rather than leave it to the government. If Darwin discovered that man is the community-creating animal, Tocqueville discovered that religion in America is the community-building institution.

It still is. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam became famous in the 1990s for his discovery that more Americans than ever are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer are joining bowling clubs and leagues. He took this as a metaphor for a society that has become individualistic rather than community-minded. He called it *Bowling Alone*.^[7] It was a phrase that summed up the loss of "social capital," that is, the extent of social networks through which people help one another.

Years later, after extensive research, Putnam revised his thesis. A powerful store of social capital still exists and it is to be found in places of worship. Survey data showed that frequent church -- or synagogue-goers are more likely to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. On almost every measure, they are demonstrably more altruistic than non-worshippers.

Their altruism goes beyond this. Frequent worshippers are also significantly more active citizens. They are more likely to belong to community organisations, neighbourhood and civic groups, and professional associations. They get involved, turn up, and lead. The margin of difference between them and the more secular is large.

Tested on attitudes, religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender, or race. Perhaps the most interesting of Putnam's findings was that these attributes were related not to people's religious beliefs but to the frequency with which they attend a place of worship.

Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to synagogue (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer or give to charity than a religious believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a community that makes it the best tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

What Moses had to do after the Golden Calf was Vayakhel -- turn the Israelites into a kehillah, a community. He did this in the obvious sense of restoring order. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the Calf, the Torah says the people were *pru'ah*, meaning "wild," "disorderly," "chaotic," "unruly," "tumultuous." He "saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and

so become a laughingstock to their enemies" (Ex. 32:25). They were not a community but a crowd. He did it in a more fundamental sense as we see in the rest of the parsha. He began by reminding the people of the laws of Shabbat. Then he instructed them to build the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, as a symbolic home for God.

Why these two commands rather than any others? Because Shabbat and the Mishkan are the two most powerful ways of building community. The best way of turning a diverse, disconnected group into a team is to get them to build something together. (See Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, (London: Continuum), 2007.)

Hence the Mishkan. The best way of strengthening relationships is to set aside dedicated time when we focus not on the pursuit of individual self interest but on the things we share, by praying together, studying Torah together, and celebrating together -- in other words, Shabbat. Shabbat and the Mishkan were the two great community-building experiences of the Israelites in the desert.

More than this: in Judaism, community is essential to the spiritual life. Our holiest prayers require a minyan. When we celebrate or mourn we do so as a community. Even when we confess, we do so together. Maimonides rules: "One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfil the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to the Jewish people -- such a person has no share in the world to come." (Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:11)

That is not how religion has always been seen. Plotinus called the religious quest, "the flight of the alone to the Alone". Dean Inge said religion is what an individual does with his solitude. Jean-Paul Sartre notoriously said: hell is other people. In Judaism, it is as a community that we come before God. For us the key relationship is not I-Thou, but We-Thou.

Vayakhel is thus no ordinary episode in the history of Israel. It marks the essential insight to emerge from the crisis of the Golden Calf. We find God in community. We develop virtue, strength of character, and a commitment to the common good in community. Community is local. It is society with a human face. It is not government. It is not the people we pay to look after the welfare of others. It is the work we do ourselves, together.

Community is the antidote to individualism on the one hand and over-reliance on the state on the other. Darwin understood its importance to human flourishing. Tocqueville saw its role in protecting democratic freedom. Robert Putnam has documented its value in sustaining social capital and the common

good. And it began in our parsha, when Moses turned an unruly mob into a kehillah, a community. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Take for yourselves an offering to the Lord. Let everyone whose heart moves him bring an offering to the Lord, gold and silver and copper... for the sanctuary and its tents and its coverings" (Exodus 35:5-11) The last two portions of Exodus seem to repeat the two previous portions of Terumah and Tetzaveh, listing the precise dimensions, materials and furnishings of the desert sanctuary. Why is such a reiteration necessary?

Before responding, we must recall that the two portions which initially commanded the construction of the sanctuary are separated from Vayakhel and Pekudei, which repeat those instructions, by last week's portion of Ki Tisa, which records the tragic incident of the Golden Calf. When we realize that according to most commentaries and midrashim, the idolatrous act with the calf occurred before the command to construct the sanctuary our problem becomes compounded. Why interrupt the story about the construction of the sanctuary with the account of the calf, and why repeat the instructions?

An analogy comes to mind: Picture an excited, engaged couple who spend the period before their wedding carefully choosing their marital home and shopping for its furnishings. Then the young groom-to-be leaves on a short business trip and is unexpectedly delayed. In his absence, his fiancée has an all-night tryst with a former boyfriend. If after the accusations, confession and breast-beating subsides, the couple resumes the search for an apartment and its accoutrements with the same enthusiasm they had before, we can feel assured that all has been forgiven and they are opening a new chapter in their relationship.

This is a metaphor for the biblical account of the Golden Calf and the construction of the sanctuary; the biblical groom is the Almighty and the bride is the People of Israel.

Our analogy may well explain the repetition as well as the placing of the calf story between the two accounts of sanctuary construction. But it leaves us with a profound religious problem. The Bible itself forbids a married (or betrothed) woman who commits adultery from returning to her betrothed/husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Why does God take Israel back after the



Golden Calf? I believe it was because of Moses. In his defense of the Jewish people before God, he initially presents three arguments: First, You [God] redeemed them paternalistically with Your great power and strong hand before they were religiously capable of dealing with independence; second, Egypt will think You only took them out to kill them in the desert, and not because You wish every human being to be free; and third, You made an irrevocable covenant with the patriarchs that their seed will live in the Land of Israel (Ex. 32:11-14).

But it is only after Moses makes another, final plea; crying out, "And now if You would only forgive their sin! But if not, erase me now from this book that You have written" (Ex. 32:32) that God actually commands Israel to go up to the Land and conquer it – proving not only that He has forgiven them, but also that His covenant with them remains intact.

The great classical commentator Rashi interprets these words along the lines of Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel: "If You would forgive their sin, it would be good and I would not ask to be erased; but if You will not forgive them, then erase me from the entire Torah, that it not be said by future generations that I was not worthy to merit Divine compassion for them." The Rashbam explains, "Erase me from the Book of Life" and the Ibn Ezra and Sforno have "Erase me from the Book of Eternal Life... and grant my merits to the Israelites so that they be forgiven." The Ramban maintains, "...If You will forgive their sins out of Your compassion, it would be good; but if not, erase me instead of them from the Book of Life."

For me, however, the interpretation truest to the plain meaning of the text comes from the Mateh Yosef, a disciple of the Hatam Sofer. Based on the Talmudic axiom (B.T. Shabbat 54b, 55a) that a leader must be held responsible for the transgressions of his "flock," Moses tells the Almighty, "How is it possible that the nation could have transgressed in so egregious a manner? Clearly, I am not worthy to be their leader. Hence, whether or not You forgive their sin, You must erase me from Your book. You must remove me from leadership, because I have been proven to be ill-prepared..."

God responds that He only punishes the actual transgressors, not their "minister," and God determines that Moses is still the best qualified to lead the nation. However, God also understands that Moses has expressed a profound truth. Perhaps Moses' flaw was that he was too much a man of God and too little a man of the people, unable to rouse and reach the Israelites in a way that would have prevented their transgression.

Nevertheless, God forgives us, as we see from the repetition in Vayakhel and Pekudei even after our idolatry. After all, it was God Himself, apparently realizing that the highest priority for covenantal Israel was a leader who would convey His eternal Torah, who

cajoled Moses into accepting the leadership of Israel in the first place. ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Rashi points out that the opening portion of this week's Torah reading was transmitted by Moshe to the entire Jewish people in public, when they were all gathered. These laws of the Sabbath that represent one of the core pillars of Judaism – the observance of the Sabbath day as a day of rest and spirituality – were communicated to everyone in a public venue. No one was obligated to hear it second hand, and take the word of anyone else, regarding the proper method of observance of the Sabbath day.

Everyone heard the instructions simultaneously and clearly, publicly, and definitively. The observance of the Sabbath day has, to a great extent, been counted by other cultures as faith at its essence and remains a uniquely Jewish idea and code of behavior. The idea of a day of rest from the toil of the week has certainly been adapted by most of human civilization. However, the methodology of defining and implementing such an abstract idea as a day of rest into reality remains wholly within the purview of Jewish tradition and Torah observance.

There is, perhaps, no more striking mark of absolute Jewish identity that exists in our society than that of observing, sanctifying, and enjoying the Sabbath day. It is a truism said by a Jewish 19th century popular thinker, that more than the Jews guarded and preserved the Sabbath, the Sabbath guarded and preserved the Jewish people. To emphasize this point, the Torah teaches us that the Shabbat not only preserves the sanctity and spirit of the individual Jew, but, since it was given publicly with everyone gathered to hear its message, it is also the guarantor for the preservation of all Jewish society and the people of Israel throughout the ages.

The fact that the Sabbath was so publicly explained and detailed, teaches us another important lesson regarding Jewish life in Jewish society. There are commandments in the Torah that can rightfully be described as private and personal. The Sabbath, however, has not only a private face to it, but a public one as well. The Jews are commanded to keep the Sabbath in their private homes, but there must also be a public Sabbath, so to speak. It must be apparent on the Jewish Street that the Sabbath has arrived and is present.

Public desecration of the Sabbath by individual Jews was a far more damaging sort of behavior than the violation of other precepts in the privacy of one's home. Part of the struggle here in the State of Israel is for the growth and influence of the public Sabbath to be maintained, as part of the Jewish identity for all Jews

who live here in our ancient home. Denying the concept of Shabbat to maintain total freedom of each individual is like a person who drills a hole under his or her seat on a ship and claims it will not affect anyone else. It is the public Sabbath as much as the private one that guarantees the survival of Jewish society and the Jewish state as well. ©2022 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Spinning Wool

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Spinning wool is one of the thirty nine labors that one is forbidden to do on Shabbat. It is actually one of the labors that are explicitly mentioned in the Torah. "Every wise hearted woman spun with her hands" and "All the women whose hearts inspired them with wisdom spun the goat hair" (Exodus 35:25,26) The essence of this labor is the gathering of small amounts of wool or cotton with one's finger tips or with a spindle to form thread. The derivation (toldah) of this labor according to one view is the forming of braids of dough and creating them into Challah.

The spinning in the Tabernacle was very special in that the wool was spun while it was still attached to the goat before the goat was sheared. Only the women who had such special wisdom were able to accomplish this; among ordinary people, this knowledge was not known. Thus anyone who would perform this labor on Shabbat, (as these women did) would not be transgressing since it is not the normal way of spinning wool.

Why did the women spin the wool this way? Some point out the zeal of these women to fulfill the Mitzva even before the animal was sheared while others say that they did this to prevent defilement for we know that the wool can never be defiled (Taamei) while it is attached to a living thing.

Another fascinating interpretation is advanced by Rav Yechiel Michal from Austrobiza who posits that since spinning as these women did is permitted on the Shabbat (as stated above) then the work of the Tabernacle became transformed to a Mitzva that is not bound by time, such, that women are also obligated to do. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The last two portions of the Book of Exodus repeat information found in previous portions of the Torah. In Parashat Vayakhel, the Tabernacle is constructed following the detailed prescriptions found in Parashat Terumah. In Parashat Pekudei, the priestly

garments are made, again following the details outlined earlier in Parashat Tetzaveh. Why the need to repeat every detail when describing the making of the Tabernacle and the garments? Wouldn't it have been enough for the Torah to simply say that the Temple was constructed and the garments were made as God had commanded?

Several reasons for the repetition can be suggested. First, the Torah may want to highlight that the commands were followed in great detail. Presenting the details of the law shows that nothing mandated by God was overlooked. Another possibility is that presenting the details again emphasizes a loving involvement in this process. Each step in making the Tabernacle and the garments was an expression of the love felt for God.

Both of these rationales are significant when considering that the Tabernacle was built after the golden calf incident. Notwithstanding their failure, the Jewish People, led by Moses, precisely and lovingly built the Tabernacle and prepared the priestly garments as God had commanded.

Perhaps, too, the answer to our question may lie in considering the sequence of events as found in the Torah:

- Parashat Terumah presents the command to construct the Tabernacle. Tetzaveh follows with the command of the priestly garments. Immediately following these portions, Shabbat is mentioned (Exodus 31:12–17).

- In contrast, Parashat Vayakhel begins with the Shabbat (Exodus 35:1–3). The building of the Tabernacle and the making of the garments follow.

In sum: the command was followed by Shabbat; but in the implementation, Shabbat comes first. In Judaism, there is sanctity of place and sanctity of time. The Tabernacle is the holiest of places; Shabbat is the holiest of times. In the "commanding" portions, holiness of place (Tabernacle) precedes holiness of time (Shabbat). In the "implementing" portions, the order is reversed.

Note again that the incident that occurs between the command and its implementation is the sin of the golden calf. From the keruvim, the angelic forms atop the Ark, God communicated with Moses (Exodus 25:22). The making of the golden calf was an attempt to replace the keruvim, thereby defiling the Tabernacle – it was nothing less than a desecration of the holiest of places.

Precisely because of this perversion of sanctity of space, the Torah repeats the whole sequence but places Shabbat first so that the Shabbat spirit sanctifying time is infused into every detail of the construction of the Tabernacle and the making of the priestly garments.

As important as place may be, time is of even greater importance. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, in

his book *The Sabbath*, remarks that while acquisition of space is an appropriate human quest, life goes wrong when we spend all our time trying to amass things. "For to have more does not mean to be more."

Ultimately, we are people who place a greater emphasis on what Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik called "empires in time" rather than "empires in space." © 2022 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Why Gather the People?

Near the end of our previous parasha, Ki Tisa, we are told that Moshe returned to Hashem on Har Sinai to seek forgiveness for the Golden Calf. Hashem instructed him to fashion a new set of tablets upon which the Ten Commandments could be written after the previous two tablets were broken. Moshe completed a second forty days which ended with Hashem forgiving the people, carving the words of the second tablets, and establishing that day as Yom Kippur, a day perpetually set in our calendar to forgive the Jewish People for their sins. Moshe descended the Mountain and gathered the people together.

Our parasha begins: "And Moshe caused to gather (Vayakhel) the entire community of the B'nei Yisrael and he said to them these are the things which Hashem has commanded to do them. Six days, work will be done and on the seventh day it will be holy, a Shabbat will be celebrated to Hashem, anyone who does work on it will be put to death. You will not kindle a fire throughout your homes on the Shabbat day."

The concept of gathering the entire community is seen on only a few occasions in the desert. We see many times that Moshe speaks to the entire nation, but it is not common for Moshe to gather everyone together as a community. Most notably we are told that the King of Israel will gather the people after each seventh year (Sh'mittah) and read the Torah before the people to remind them of their responsibilities. The Ramban explains the difference between gathering the people and speaking to all of the people. The word *vayakhel* is used when Moshe wished to speak to both the men and the women. Had it said *vayomer*, it would mean only the men. The Ramban maintained that here it was necessary to speak to the women also, as they too were asked for donations for the building of the Mishkan.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, expresses another reason for the need for *vayakheil* here. The B'nei Yisrael had just suffered through the sin of the Golden Calf, the Eigel haZahav and had been forgiven by Hashem. Still the people were saddened by their own weakness and now felt even weaker from the loss of the three thousand who were killed in punishment for

their participation in this sin. Still others had suffered losses from the plague that Hashem had brought on the rest of the people for their acquiescent involvement in this sin. Had Moshe gathered only the men, he would have gathered six hundred thousand people. This would mean that one in every two hundred people had sinned. By now including the women and children, the percentage of those who sinned was lowered to one in a thousand. Also, here was a cleansing element in that not one woman was involved among those who worshipped the Eigel. Even when the men brought the gold earrings and nose rings for the Eigel, they had to pry them off of their wives, as no woman willfully donated to that idol. For the donations to the Mishkan, however, the women joyously donated their gold, as the gold from their community was able to atone for the gold from the rebellious ones who had produced the Eigel.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch presents us with a different perspective on the need for gathering all of the people together. When Moshe returned to the people with the Second Tablets, representing Hashem's forgiveness for the Eigel HaZahav, the people were presented with a new opportunity to become closer to Hashem through that forgiveness. "The people and the priests had learned to know themselves in their state of complete immature weakness, to realize the necessity for incessant work on themselves, and how great was their necessity for elevation and atonement. They had also learned to know Hashem in the whole weight of His justice and the infinite depth of His grace. From the stage of feeling completely rejected by Hashem, up to the extreme height of regained grace, they had tasted every shade of our relation to Hashem." The entire nation was now to build the Mishkan. This would become the place from which the entire nation, men, women, and children, could find the strength to "work up to the height of their calling, and the strength to keep up to this height when attained."

The Torah makes clear to us that the Mishkan was the place on Earth in which Hashem dwelled. The Mishkan was the place for our offerings to Hashem. We know that these were our means of attaining forgiveness for the sins which we transgressed. Hirsch explains that the events that the Jews had just experienced changed their understanding of both the Mishkan and the offerings. After the Jews had sinned with the most horrible sin of the Eigel HaZahav and still had been forgiven by Hashem even without bringing a korban, they approached the task of building the Mishkan with a new understanding of its purpose. The people had experienced their own weakness and their own strength "without Temple and without offering." This new Temple and its offerings were now to become a "means of showing the way to gain the grace of Hashem."

Hirsch's explanation of the Temple and the offerings as symbols through which we are "shown the way" to forgiveness, is somewhat comforting to us in this period of time when we are without our Holy Temple and its offerings. All of our mitzvot are guides to us on our path to act properly towards our fellowman and serve Hashem. Reform Judaism thought that we could do away with these symbols and still lead a proper life. Theoretically that might be possible, but it is those symbols and guidelines that give us the ability to "control" our emotions and desires. A Jew who can limit the type of food that he eats and withstand the temptation to partake of foods when they are not kosher, may be better able to control his desire for the accumulation of money at the expense of others. He can apply the mastery of one control to another.

The B'nei Yisrael in the desert were fortunate to have the Mishkan and the offerings together with the pageantry of the Kohanim when they built the "dwelling place" of Hashem on Earth. May we be zocheh in our lifetimes to have this same experience when we rebuild the Third Bet HaMikdash bimheira b'yameinu. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd the congregation of the Children of Israel left from before Moshe." (Shmos 35:20) As soon as Moshe Rabbeinu told the Jews the list of items Hashem wanted from them for the Mishkan, they all excused themselves and left Moshe's presence. Though he didn't officially dismiss them, it may be understood that he expected them to leave when he finished delivering his message so they could quickly begin bringing items.

Perhaps it was because he knew they'd run to start the construction process that he prefaced his remarks with the requirement to keep Shabbos. Building the Mishkan does not take precedence over Shabbos, and he wanted them to know that. Had he waited until afterwards, though, people might have run out and missed that important piece of information.

We learn from their behavior the importance of acting on inspiration. As soon as they heard there was an opportunity for them to be part of something great, they ran to collect the offerings they would donate.

However, even as they acted on their enthusiasm, they backed away from Moshe humbly and respectfully, as students taking leave of their master. When they came back, says the Chida, the general populace allowed the greater people to approach first, and only then came forward. This was a sign of respect.

This teaches us the praise of Klal Yisrael that though they were passionate about their project, they didn't lose sight of how to treat those worthy of respect. It was this combination of enthusiasm and restraint

which was so praiseworthy. The balance they had of the urgency to build the Mishkan with the importance of maintaining the sanctity of the Shabbos, was a paradigm for Jews for generations to come.

When doing something, no matter how important or necessary, we must ensure that we don't let ourselves get so carried away with the mission that we cross lines we should not. While trying to keep the Torah and Mitzvos, or ensure that others are doing so, we must be careful that we don't transgress other serious commandments in our pursuit of perfection.

Hashem has given us many guidelines and commandments, and He wants us to fulfill them all. When they seem to be at odds with each other, then one must seek direction or utilize the Torah's perspective to identify how to properly proceed.

The Jews in the Midbar, grateful for being given a second chance after the sin of the Golden Calf where they did NOT make proper calculations, understood that a Jew's life is a balancing act whose graceful movements are as beautiful to watch as to perform.

A Kollel fellow in Lakewood did not daven in the Yeshiva minyan as was the accepted practice at that time. He davened at a different minyan, and arrived at the study hall when he was supposed to, but was asked to explain why he broke from the norm.

He said, "There's a woman in town with five children and she can't get them off to school alone. This one needs breakfast; that one needs help getting dressed, and so on. That is where I am at that time and why I need to daven at a different minyan."

Impressed, the Rabbonim asked, "Who is this woman? We'll help too!" He replied, "The woman is my wife," he smiled, "and thank you, but we'll manage on our own." © 2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Fueled by Fire

There is a well-known parable that explains the relationship of thought to deed. Deeds are vehicles that can bring ideas and concepts from "Point A to Point B", like a car, train or boat. Thoughts are what power those deeds, similar to fuel, coal or wind. When one has deeds without thought the vehicle cannot be properly powered. Thoughts without deed, however, are simply gas and a lot of hot air.

The mitzva to bring the half-shekel coin, as mentioned in Parshat Shekalim, is the balance of thought and deed.

זֶהוּ יְתוֹן כָּל-הָעֶבֶר עַל-הַפְּקָדִים מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בַּשֶּׁקֶל
:"הַקֹּדֶשׁ" - "everyone passing by to be counted must give this—half a shekel based on the shekel of the Holy" (Shmot 30:13)

Moshe, uncertain of the commandment, asked HaShem to which coin He was referring.

The Midrash narrates His answer to Moshe:
אמר רבי מאיר נטל הקדוש ברוך הוא כמין מטבע של אש מתחת

כֶּסֶף הַכְּבוֹד וְהַרְאָה לוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה זָה יִתְּנוּ, קִדָּה יִתְּנוּ. "Rav Meir said: HaShem took a coin of fire from beneath the Throne of Glory and showed it to Moshe. This they should give. Like this they should give" (Bamidbar Rabba 12: 3)

The "burning" questions of Moshe were: Why was it shown made of fire, why from under the Throne and why only a half-shekel and not a whole one?

In his work Midbar Shur, Rav Kook explains that the requirement of a half-shekel is the expression of unity of the Jewish people. Each person, regardless of status, was to bring the same "half" coin. None of us are "whole" and only as a nation can we be complete. The "missing" half shekel, explains Rav Kook, represents thought. The fire is the burning desire for consideration of others, Ahavat Yisrael, which goes in tandem with our physical deeds. The source of our this is the Throne of Glory, from where emanates the collective soul of the Jewish people.

Thus, G-d shows Moshe that unity occurs through deeds performed for others, powered by a communal thought/responsibility and rooted in the common bond of our souls.

And where did those half-shekel coins go? They were made into the "adanim", the small braces that joined the wall beams. While not easily seen, these braces were what held the Mishkan together. Without the adanim, the Mishkan couldn't stand. The other half-shekel funded the communal sacrifices, our connection to G-d.

The very foundations of the Mishkan, both physical and spiritual, had to come from a half coin, given equally by everyone, thus unifying the nation in thought and deed.

Today, the custom of giving of the "half-shekel" coin is purely symbolic in order to recall the mitzva (we should soon see its return). The purpose of the half-shekel, however is still relevant today and forever.

If G-d simply wanted to raise the money for communal expenses, He would have had Moshe make a "General Campaign" and everyone would give as they see fit, as with the other contributions for the Mishkan. The wealthy could give more, the less fortunate not as much. While extremely important to the "cause", such an appeal would not set the foundation for giving. G-d wanted us to understand that communal responsibility and deed is a great equalizer and offers everyone the opportunity to participate.

The "half-shekel" levels the playing field with a relatively small obligation. As Rav Kook explains, in our deeds it is not only what we can see or touch that matters. It's that half-shekel of "fire", our thoughts and intentions, not necessarily tangible, combined with actions, that compose true kindness.

What are our goals when giving charity or helping others?

Does our donation carry the expectation of

recognition or reward? Are we helping someone in need to make them better or just to make ourselves feel good? How altruistic are we? Will our contributions unify us with others or elevate our status above another who may not be able to do the same?

The half shekel sets the standard. It created the foundation that unified the nation through the physical components of the Mishkan as well as the spiritual sacrifices. A perfect combination of thought and deed.

Our giving must be in practice and with consideration. It's not only about what we are doing in action but also the thought and desire to truly make things better for everyone else. ©2022 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Moses commanded the Jewish people regarding the materials for the Tabernacle: "Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring an offering of the Almighty" (Exodus 35:5). What lesson do we learn from the command being directed to those who have a "willing heart"?

Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm explains that those who brought the offerings for the Tabernacle should bring their hearts with their offering. It is not sufficient just to give a monetary donation. The Almighty wants our hearts, that is our thoughts and our emotions.

When you just give money to a charity or worthy institution, you help the cause for which you are giving. However, when you give with your heart, you are changing and elevating yourself as a person. Each donation makes you into a more giving person. Whenever you give, reflect before you give and then give with a full heart! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

