Rabbi Katz’s Short-hand Written Drashah for Parshiyot Vayakhel-Pekudei
March 13, 2021 - 1 Nissan 5781

The pasuk (36:6) says that Moshe Rabbeinu asked the Jewish people to stop donating to the building of the Mishkan, but he does so in a peculiar way: “And Moshe commanded and sent out a message in the camp, saying, ‘man and woman, do not do any more work towards the contributions of the holy, and the people stopped from bringing any more’.

There are a few nuances to analyze in this verse, but one in particular seems inconsistent. First, Moshe says “do not do any more work”, but it then says that the people “stopped... bringing”, not working. If Moshe only asked them to stop working, why did they also stop contributing?

The first Belzer Rebbe, Rav Shalom Rokeach (1779-1855) explains that this was the only way the Jewish people would stop contributing. If Moshe Rabbeinu had asked them to simply stop contributing, but would allow them to keep working, they would feel compelled to continue investing. The more they worked on the Mishkan, the more they desired to attach themselves to it. The work was so rewarding that they would want to give to it more. The only way Moshe could stop them from contributing was to first tell them to stop working. It was only once they were disengaged from the work that they no longer felt compelled to donate.

Bnei Yisrael show us that this trick works in both directions. On the one hand, the less involved we are in an actual activity, the less we’ll feel the need to invest. On the other hand, if we push ourselves to get involved, the process will snowball and lead to more and more success.

Sometimes our fears of an activity are simply inexperience. We don’t want to start a new routine because we just don’t know what it’ll be like. Maybe we don’t want to engage because it brings with it too many different responsibilities, that one would rather not ‘open up a can of worms’. The truth is, however, one you put your foot in the water it’s a lot easier to jump in.

This is also part of our role on the Seder night. We’re all tasked with becoming a slave ourselves, trying to feel what it was like. Through the story, the matzah, the marror, and the other rituals of the night, we’re constantly trying to invest in our history, but on an experiential basis. From a distance, it may not be as clear, but once we engage with the various activities of the night we start to connect, culminating with celebratory wine, feasting, and singing.

Instead of thinking that in order to invest in something we have to already desire it beforehand, the Jewish people teach us that it can also go the other way around: In order to desire, you sometimes have to invest. And lest that investment looks daunting and unrealistic, one just has to be willing to start small, and the reward will snowball on its own.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Katz