

This Week In Torah *Vayakel-Pekudai*

Rarely does a book of Torah end in an upbeat manner. But the Book of Exodus ends with a sense of true joy. The tabernacle is built and God “moves in.” Mission accomplished for Moses, Betzelel, Ohliab, and the rest of the Israelites. The enthusiasm of the Israelites is overflowing beyond the task; their *kavanah*/spiritual integrity has not burned out—there is still energy to do the *mitzvot*, passion to keep the covenantal relationship thriving, and commitment to pass these words on to future generations. Rabbi Gordon Tucker who is the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, said that as the Book comes to an end, responsibility shifts to the people. It is now up to their memory to engage, rather than hearing the Divine Voice calling to them.

The 19th century Chasidic master Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leitner noted that in these sections of Torah, eight times Moses is commanded to do the work of the *Mishkan* [building the Holy Tabernacle], seven times it includes the phrase “just as God commanded”, but on the last one it was missing. Why? According to Rabbi Mordechai Yosef, it was because Moses was outside the *Mishkan* and God was inside—Moses could not hear but had to trust his memory in order to remember what had to be done. The *Kedushat Levi*, that is Levi Yitzhak whose teaching influenced all of *Chasidut*, noted in Deuteronomy 27:10 that there is a difference between HEARING God’s Voice and HEEDING to the words of Torah. Following the *mitzvot* without digging deeper into the reasons why is HEEDING, understanding through study and discourse as we do is HEARING. Moses has heard, now he has to heed so that he can build an intimacy that will permit him to hear once again. And that is how Exodus ends—with Moses taking a final step to have God amongst the people and the people yearning for that intimacy.

Exodus 36:7 “**the labor was enough for all the labor, to do and leave more behind**”

Sounds like a contradiction! Not so says RaSHI—their enthusiasm was so great that the tasks invigorated them and their energy to do God’s will was still quite strong after the task was completed. The 19th Century sage known as the Malbim added that the energy was collective of sorts that enabled the people to conduct repairs [*Tikkun*] into future

generations. But one has to wonder—was it the memory of what happened that was learned through the study of Torah or was it a new found capability to hear God speak to us that keeps the energy intact?

The *Degel Machane Efraim* believed that every bit of creativity and ingenuity we possess sparks us to kindle that energy found in Sinai and thru our studying, we make new *chidushei Toratam*, new connections to Torah which enables us to hear God anew in each generation. According to the *Degel*, the work of building the *Mishkan* involved all the same labor that God used to create the earth. Everything we create reflects the sense of the Divine spark which brings us back to hearing God. Just as Isaiah taught: “I placed My word in your mouths... to plant the heavens and to form the earth.”

For us, knowing what has happened helps remind us of the sanctity of heeding the words of Torah. But being able to create and be inspired to build something is an internal catalyst to move us from mere rote living to a sacred one where God is always speaking to us.