

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the *drasha* sponsors:

- Bert and Bina Kahn, in memory of Bert's mother, Edith Kahn, Itta bas Nosson, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 29th of Adar.
- Murray and Baila Jacobson, in memory of Murray's mother, Rose Jacobson, Chana Reizel bas Ezra Yehuda, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 3rd of Adar II.
- Shimon and Hana Millrod, in memory of Shimon's father, Morris Millrod, Reb Moshe ben Yaakov, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 1st of Adar II.

May the *neshamos* have an *aliya*, and may the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha* and good health.

The horrible situation unfolding in Ukraine is extremely troubling. The effect of the Russian attack on Ukraine, and specifically on the large Jewish community there--hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters-- as well as the broad geopolitical implications, must lead us to daven with urgency for safety and security to be restored.

Last Tuesday evening, our shul hosted a community-wide *asifa* to say Tehillim. Two dozen congregational rabbis and many hundreds of people from all parts of the Baltimore community participated. More recently, I participated in a conference call organized by the Orthodox Union with several rabbis operating in Ukraine, and their first hand description of the current situation is truly horrifying. The most immediate danger is the shortage of food and shelter...the danger is real. We cannot just go through our days as usual, while this is taking place. I encourage everyone to assist by donating funds through the Orthodox Union emergency fund and davening to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to restore calm to Ukraine and the entire world, amen.

Parshas Pekudei begins after the Mishkan is already complete. What does Moshe do now? The Torah tells us the first thing he did, before they began to use it, was to give an accounting of every “dollar” raised and spent.

שמות פרק לח: כא אלה פקודי המשכן משכן העדת אשר פקד על פי משה עבדת הלויים ביד איתמר בן אהרן הכהן:
21. *These are the records of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the Pact, which were drawn up at Moses' bidding—the work of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.*

כד. כָּל־הַזָּהָב הָעָשׂוּי לְמִלְאָהּ בְּכֹל מִלְאָכָת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיְהִי וַיְהִי זָהָב הַתְּנוּפָה תָּשַׁע וָעֶשְׂרִים כֶּפֶר וַיִּשְׁבַּע מֵאוֹת וַיִּשְׁלֹשִׁים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ:
כה. וַיִּכְסֹּף פְּקוּדֵי הָעֵדָה מֵאֵת כֶּפֶר וְאֵלֶּף וַיִּשְׁבַּע מֵאוֹת וַחֲמֵשֶׁה וּשְׁבַעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ:
כו. בָּקַע לְגִלְגָּלֹת מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְכֹל הַעֹבֵר עַל־הַפְּקוּדִים מִבְּנֵי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְמַעְלָה לְשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף וַיִּשְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמֵשִׁים:
כז. וַיְהִי מֵאֵת כֶּפֶר הַכֶּסֶף לְצִקָּת אֵת אֲדֹנָי הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵת אֲדֹנָי הַפְּרֻכָּת מֵאֵת אֲדֹנָי לְמֵאֵת הַכֶּפֶר כֶּפֶר לְאֲדֹנָי:
כח. וְאֵת־הָאֵלֶּף וַיִּשְׁבַּע הַמֵּאוֹת וַחֲמֵשֶׁה וּשְׁבַעִים עֶשְׂרֵה נָוִים לְעִמּוּדִים וְצִפָּה רְאִשֵׁיהֶם וַחֲשֵׁק אֲתָם:
כט. וַיִּתְּנוּשֶׁת הַתְּנוּפָה שְׁבַעִים כֶּפֶר וְאֲלָפִים וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל:

24. *All the gold that was used for the work, in all the work of the sanctuary—the elevation offering of gold—came to 29 talents and 730 shekels by the sanctuary weight.*

25. *The silver of those of the community who were recorded came to 100 talents and 1,775 shekels by the sanctuary weight:*

26. *a half-shekel by the sanctuary weight, for each one who was entered in the records, from the age of twenty years up, 603,550 men.*

27. *The 100 talents of silver were for casting the sockets of the sanctuary and the sockets for the curtain, 100 sockets to the 100 talents, a talent a socket.*

28. *And of the 1,775 shekels he made hooks for the posts, overlay for their tops, and bands around them.*

29. *The copper from the elevation offering came to 70 talents and 2,400 shekels.*

Pekudei derives its name from the detailed **account**, or reckoning, of the contributions made towards the construction of the Mishkan.

After completing the construction of the Mishkan and even before beginning to use the new structure, Moshe felt it was necessary to do a full audit and file a “tax return” of sorts for his corporation. Why was this so important? What lesson can we learn from his actions?

If we go back to the beginning of the construction of the Mishkan, the House of God, we learn something that was of extreme importance to Hashem regarding the construction that is not necessarily a priority for all city planners and architects.

בית הלוי שמות פרק כה

דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה מאת כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי. הנה באה פרשה זו אחרי פרשת משפטים דבתחילה קודם שיעשה האדם צדקה בממונו צריך לראות שלא יהיה בממונו חשש גזל דאל"כ אין הצדקה מועלת לו כלל וכמו דלולב הגזול פסול משום מצוה הבאה בעבירה, וזהו שאמר הפסוק (ישעי' נ"ט) והוסג אחור משפט וצדקה מרחוק תעמוד, דאחר שהוסג המשפט ע"כ גם הצדקה שעושיין עומדת מרחוק ואינו מועיל להם כלל. וזהו שאה"כ (שם נו) שמרו משפט ועשו צדקה כי קרובה ישועתי לבא. וע"כ אמר להם תחילה משפטים ואח"כ ציום על נדבת המשכן:

The **Beis HaLevi** writes that Parshas Mishpatim immediately precedes Parshas Teruma to teach that when it comes to building a Mishkan, we shouldn't focus only on getting the building built and the edifice completed. Hashem cares about the **character** of the people paying for it and building it.

Similarly, **Rav Shimon Schwab** writes that money donated to the Mishkan was called *shekel hakodesh*—holy money—because Hashem was particular about the type of money used that it be obtained ethically:

מעין בית השואבה

י"ל שהנה המרויח ממון ויש בו תערובת אונאה או הלנת שכר שכיר או קצת רבית או קצת שכר שבת ויו"ט אז אין השקל שלם שהרי אין כולו שלו, ואמרה התורה זה יתנו מחצית השקל בשקל הקודש שיהיה **כל השקל בקדושה**, והיינו על ידי שיהיה "עשרים גרה השקל" ולא שיחסר כמה מעות מהשקל על ידי תערובת איסור או ממון שאינו שלו.

When one wishes to donate money for tzedaka or appropriate money for objects to be used in the performance of mitzvos, one must be certain that every penny was acquired honestly.

In *Rav Schwab on Chumash* (pp. 302-302), the story is told about a man who offered a large donation to Rav Schwab, who would not accept the donation immediately. Years before, the man had declared bankruptcy and had thus freed himself from his legal debts to many creditors. Rav Schwab insisted that the man first pay off all those creditors. Until he had done so, Rav Schwab did not consider his contribution to be “*shekel hakodesh*.”

Therefore, before he even started fundraising for the Mishkan, Moshe taught the people the *halachos* of *choshen mishpat*, how to acquire money honestly, and presumably he also taught them *Pirkei Avos*, how to treat your fellow human beings.

And then, when it was all done, all money collected and everything built, Moshe counted to make sure every “dollar” donated was accounted for, and he let everyone know that all was done properly. Again, all of this was done, before the mishkan was used for the first time.

The lesson is obvious—**both the starting point and end point in our avodas Hashem must be honesty of character and integrity.** Both before and after we perform a Mitzva—we must do an **accounting** not only of the performance of the Mitzvah—the *kiyum hamitzva*—but what got us there...and where we are headed. Because in Judaism, it is not only about getting the Mitzvah done with all the bells and whistles...there is much more to consider...there is much more that Hashem is focused upon—namely our character. **Hashem cares about who we are as much as He cares about what we do.** Hashem considers the character of a person before He evaluates their actions.

There is a famous and powerful story concerning the saintly **Rabbi Yisrael Salanter**. Rabbi Salanter was once invited for a meal at the home of a wealthy individual. After kiddush, the meal continued, of course, with the *netilas yadayim* ritual, the pre-meal hand washing. However, it was noticed that while everyone washed their hands with an abundance of water, Rabbi Salanter washed his hands with only the minimum amount of water required.

During the meal, the host could not hide his curiosity anymore and asked Rabbi Salanter why he used so little water in order to perform the pre-meal hand washing. “Rabbi!” He exclaimed, “Why did you use so little water to wash your hands? Thank God, I lack for nothing, and everything—especially water—is available in abundance! We are also taught that those who wash their hands with an abundance of water will receive extra blessings!”

Rabbi Salanter answered with the following question: “How do you get the water – not from your home but from the well, is that right?”

The host answered, “That woman over there is my maid. Her job is to bring water from the well as needed.”

“I thought so” said Rabbi Salanter. “I couldn’t bring myself to wash with more water than I truly needed, knowing that your maid would then be forced to schlep more water from the well. What a backbreaking job! **I don’t want her to have to perform extra work for my stringencies.** I am much happier using the minimum amount of water if doing so will save her time, pain, and hard labor! Hashem will send me blessing through the performance of some other mitzvah.”

That is the lesson that Moshe Rabbeinu taught us. Even when performing Mitzvos, we must always be aware of where things come from and we must keep a constant accounting of all we do...that all our money is “shekel hakodesh” and that all of our actions are truly holy and ethical.

Mitzva observance is more than just how much water we use in our *netilas yadaim* or how much gold we put into the Mishkan. Hashem cares where the water and the gold came from—the character of the builders and contributors. And that takes thought and contemplation. It means constantly making an accounting of our actions. It is easy to become focused only on our actions themselves, and less so on the consequences and effects of our actions.

The **Mesilas Yesharim** writes in Chapter 3 regarding the appropriate way to monitor oneself:

הנה הרוצה לפקח על עצמו, שתים הנה ההשקפות הצריכות לו. האחת, שיתבונן מהו הטוב האמיתי שיבחר בו האדם, והרע האמיתי שינוס ממנו. והשניה, על המעשים אשר הוא עושה לראות אם הם מכלל הטוב או מכלל הרע.

He who wants to watch over himself must investigate two matters. The first: that he contemplate what is the true good for man to choose and what is the true evil for him to flee from. The

second: on the actions which he does, to determine if they are in the category of the good or the evil.

וזה, בשעת מעשה ושלא בשעת מעשה. בשעת מעשה שלא יעשה שום מעשה מבלי שישקול אותו במאזני זאת הידיעה .
This applies both to times when he is in the act of doing and when not in the act of doing.

When in the act of doing: that he not do any act without first weighing it on the scales of this understanding.

ושלא בשעת מעשה שיעלה לפניו זכרון כלל מעשיו וישקול אותם כמו כן במאזני המשקל הזה לראות מה יש בם מהרע למען ידחה אותו, ומה מן הטוב להתמיד בו ולהתחזק בו. ואם ימצא בהם מן הרע, אז יתבונן ויחקור בשכלו איזה תחבולה יעשה לסור מן הרע ההוא וליטהר ממנו .

Not in the act of doing: that he bring up before himself the remembrance of his deeds in general and weigh them, likewise, in these scales to determine what they contain of evil in order to relinquish it and what of good, in order to perpetuate it and strengthen himself in it. If he finds in them an aspect of evil, he should then contemplate and investigate, reasoning out a strategy to employ in order to turn away from that evil and cleanse himself of it.

The **Ramchal** encourages people to make an accounting of their lives and actions every day, and to constantly consider how to do things better. He encourages making a “*pikudei*” each and every day.

We just began Adar Sheni, and the Purim spirit is in the air. There are many things that contributed to the salvation of the Jewish people in those days. But it is interesting to note that the turning point in the Purim story is when Achashverosh read his הזכרונות, his chronicles, and discovered that he had not properly repaid Mordechai for saving his life.

Similarly, the take-away for us is that we should take the time to consider the details of our lives—the specific actions and events that make up our lives-- and train ourselves to scrutinize our actions carefully and meticulously. Only then can we hope to become the best version of ourselves.

That is the everlasting lesson of the Mishkan: the honest means and moral character Hashem wants in our ritual performance of Mitzvos, and our requirement to actively monitor our lives at all times...to constantly take a pekudei, and accounting of our lives...to make that happen.

The Jewish people are known as a people of the book. **But we must be known first and foremost as a nation immersed in kindness and good deeds, honesty and ethics, integrity and character. As a nation, we must not be afraid to engage in honest self reflection, and that should be our greatest message to the world...that must be our legacy.**

As the world faces a tremendous challenge, this is a time for each of us to take stock of our lives and see how we can improve, in our relationship with Hashem and others. And in that zechus, may we help restore the Holy Beis Hamikdash bimhera viyamenu...amen.