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On Jewish Character

Britain's Former **Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Covenant and Conversation Family Edition on OU Life

Pekudei has sometimes been called the accountant's parsha, because that is how it begins, with the audited accounts of the money and materials donated to the Sanctuary. It is the Torah's way of teaching us the need for financial transparency.

But beneath the sometimes dry surface lie two extraordinary stories, one told in last week's parsha, the other the week before, teaching us something deep about Jewish nature that is still true today.

The first has to do with the Sanctuary itself. God told Moses to ask people to make contributions. Some brought gold, some silver, some copper. Some gave wool or linen or animal-skins. Others contributed acacia wood, oil, spices or incense. Some gave precious stones for the High Priest's breastplate. What was remarkable was the willingness with which they gave: The people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the Sanctuary left what they were doing and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done."

So Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the Sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work. (Ex. 36:3-7)

They brought too much. Moses had to tell them to stop. That is not the Israelites as we have become accustomed to seeing them, argumentative, quarrelsome, ungrateful. This is a people that longs to give.

One parsha earlier we read a very different story. The people were anxious. Moses had been up the mountain for a long time. Was he still alive? Had

some accident happened to him? If so, how would they receive the Divine word telling them what to do and where to go? Hence their demand for a calf – essentially an oracle, an object through which Divine instruction could be heard.

Aaron, according to the most favoured explanation, realised that he could not stop the people directly by refusing their request, so he adopted a stalling manoeuvre. He did something with the intention of slowing them down, trusting that if the work could be delayed, Moses would reappear. This is what he said:

Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." (Ex. 32:2)

According to the Midrash he thought this would create arguments within families and the project would be delayed. Instead, immediately thereafter, without a pause, we read:

So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. (Ex. 32:3)

Again the same generosity. Now, these two projects could not be less alike. One, the Tabernacle, was holy. The other, the calf, was close to being an idol. Building the Tabernacle was a supreme mitzvah; making the calf was a terrible sin. Yet their response was the same in both cases. Hence this comment of the sages:

One cannot understand the nature of this people. If they are appealed to for a calf, they give. If appealed to for the Tabernacle, they give. [Yerushalmi Shekalim 1, 45]

The common factor was generosity. Jews may not always make the right choices in what they give to, but they give.

In the twelfth century, Moses Maimonides twice interrupts his customary calm legal prose in his law code, the Mishneh Torah, to make the same point. Speaking about tzedakah, charity, he says:

"We have never seen or heard about a Jewish community which does not have a charity fund." [Laws of Gifts to the poor, 9:3]

The idea that a Jewish community could exist without a network of charitable provisions was almost inconceivable. Later in the same book, Maimonides says:

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous person, a descendant of Abraham our father, as it is said, "For I know him, that he will command his children . . . to do tzedakah" . . . If someone is cruel and does not show mercy, there are sufficient grounds to suspect his lineage, since cruelty is found only among the other nations . . . Whoever refuses to give charity is called Belial, the same term which is applied to idol worshippers. [Laws of Gifts to the poor, 10:1-3]

Maimonides is here saying more than that Jews give charity. He is saying that a charitable disposition is written into Jewish genes, part of our inherited DNA. It is one of the signs of being a child of Abraham, so much so that if someone does not give charity there are "grounds to suspect his lineage."

Whether this is nature or nurture or both, to be Jewish is to give. There is a fascinating feature of the geography of the land of Israel. It contains two seas: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of life. The Dead Sea, as its name implies, is not. Yet they are fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee receives water and gives water. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. To receive but not to give is, in Jewish geography as well as Jewish psychology, simply not life.

So it was in the time of Moses. So it is today. In virtually every country in which Jews live, their charitable giving is out of all proportion to their numbers. In Judaism, to live is to give.

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha PEKUDEI

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the more popular buzzwords bandied about in current society is transparency. Loosely, this means that governments and financial institutions should have no secrets and that the public be allowed to know everything that occurs and to be able to see how money is being spent and allocated. This is a noble goal but like many goals it runs contrary to human nature and the goal is rarely if ever achieved.

In this week's Torah reading we have an example of complete transparency regarding the materials donated by the Jewish people for the construction of the Tabernacle. Additionally, it discusses the priestly vestments during the encampment of the Jewish people in the Sinai desert, after their exodus from Egyptian slavery. Moshe accounts for every piece of material that was collected for this holy and noble project.

Jewish tradition tells us that Moshe was unable to account for 1000 measures of silver that were donated but he did not remember for what they were used. Then, almost miraculously, the silver identified itself as being used for the hooks for the tapestries of the Tabernacle and Moshe's accounting was proven to be accurate to the final degree and coin. Such transparency is necessary for people are by nature suspicious of others and especially of government when it comes to handling money or other precious materials. There was always the suspicion – many times proven to be a correct – that somehow money was mishandled or worse, appropriated into private pockets instead of for the public good. Therefore, the accounting by Moshe to the Jewish people regarding the donations for the building of the Tabernacle is not to be viewed as an act of piety but rather one of absolute necessity.

To emphasize this point and to make clear where the Torah stands on issues of financial transparency is perhaps the reason that such space and detail is devoted in the Torah to this accounting of the funds and material used and donated in the building process of the Tabernacle. The Torah could have allowed itself to merely state that after all the donations were collected and tallied and the work of the artisans and builders of the Tabernacle was completed, then Moshe gave a full accounting of this matter to the Jewish people. But such a statement, even from Moshe, would not have sufficed to allay the suspicious nature of the public, a nature that always judges its leaders harshly and suspiciously.

The rabbis point out to us that none of the garments that the priests wore while performing their holy duties in the Temple had pockets. This was the case so no one could suspect them of taking any of the property of the Temple or any public donations. Transparency therefore is a proactive undertaking and should be performed willingly and thoroughly without being given grudgingly as an answer to public demand. The standard is a high one, but the Torah never shirks from making lofty goals. The Torah reading of this week reminds us of this constant challenge.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Pekudei: Always on His Mind

Rav Kook Torah

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (1863-1940), the brilliant Lithuanian scholar and posek, was known to write scholarly Halachic correspondence while simultaneously conversing with a visitor on a totally different subject. When questioned how he accomplished this remarkable feat, Rabbi Grodzinski humbly replied that his talent was not so unusual.

“What, have you never heard of a businessman who mentally plans out his day while reciting the morning prayers?”

Constant Awareness

One of the eight special garments worn by the kohen gadol, the high priest, was the tzitz. This was a gold plate worn across the forehead, engraved with the words kodesh le-Hashem - “Holy to God.”

The Torah instructs the kohen gadol that the tzitz “will be on his forehead – always” (Ex. 28:38). The Sages understood this requirement not as addressing where the head-plate is worn, but rather how it is worn. It is not enough for the tzitz to be physically on his forehead. It must be always “on his mind.” The kohen gadol must be constantly aware of the tzitz and its succinct message of “Holy to God” while serving in the Temple. His service requires conscious recognition of the purpose of his actions, without irrelevant thoughts and musings. He cannot be like the fellow whose mind was preoccupied with business matters while he mumbled his daily prayers.

Tefillin and the Tzitz

The golden head-plate brings to mind another holy object worn above the forehead: tefillin. In fact, the Sages compared the two. Like the tzitz, wearing tefillin requires one to be always aware of their presence. The Talmud in Shabbat 12a makes the following a fortiori argument: If the tzitz, upon which God's name is engraved just once, requires constant awareness, then certainly tefillin, containing scrolls in which God's name is written many times, have the same requirement.

This logic, however, appears flawed. Did the Sages really mean to say that tefillin, worn by any Jew, are holier objects than the sacred head-plate worn only by the high priest when serving in the Temple?

Furthermore, why is it that God's name is only recorded once on the tzitz, while appearing many times on the scrolls inside tefillin?

Connecting to Our Goals

We may distinguish between two aspects of life: our ultimate goals, and the means by which we attain these goals. It is easy to lose sight of our true goals when we are preoccupied with the ways of achieving them.

Even those who are careful to ‘stay on track’ may lack clarity as to the true purpose of life. The Sages provided a basic rule: “All of your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven” (Avot 2:12). However, knowledge of what God wants us to do in every situation is by no means obvious. Success in discovering the highest goal, in comprehending our purpose in life, and being able to relate all of life's activities to this central goal - all depend on our wisdom and insight.

For the kohen gadol, everything should relate to the central theme of “Holy to God.” We expect that the individual suitable for such a high office will have attained the level of enlightenment where all of life's activities revolve around a single ultimate goal. Therefore the tzitz mentions God's name just once - a single crowning value. Most people, however, do not live on this level of enlightened holiness. We have numerous spiritual goals, such as performing acts of kindness, charity, Torah study, prayer, and acquiring wisdom. By relating our actions to these values, we elevate ourselves and sanctify our lives. For this reason, the scrolls inside tefillin mention God's name many times, reflecting the various spiritual goals that guide us.

In order to keep life's ultimate goals in sight, we need concrete reminders. The tzitz and tefillin, both worn on the forehead above the eyes, are meant to help us attain this state of mindfulness.

Now we may understand the logic of comparing these two holy objects. Even the kohen gadol, despite his broad spiritual insight, needed to be constantly aware of the tzitz on his forehead and its fundamental message of kodesh le-Hashem. All the more so an average person, with a variety of goals, must remain conscious of the spiritual message of his tefillin at all times.

(The Splendor of Tefillin. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 26)

See also: The Dual Nature of the Tabernacle

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Remarks Made to RIETS Rabbinic Alumni, a.k.a. "Surrendering to the Almighty", a.k.a. "Talmud Torah and Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim"[1]

by, **Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l**

...however, before I am going to do that I have to discharge another duty and believe me, I do it with sadness in my heart. You know me; I have never criticized anybody, I've never attacked anybody, and I have never set myself up as the judge and arbiter to approve or disapprove statements made by some people. However, today, let me say it in Hebrew, "[כלו כל הקיצין]"[2], and I feel it is my duty to make the following statement, and I am very sad that I have to do it. But somehow, I have no choice in the matter; there is no alternative. What I am going to say, I want you to understand, is my credo about Torah and the way Torah should be taught and Torah should be studied.

I have been a Rosh Yeshiva, a teacher of Talmud all my life, at least the major part of my adult life. I have taught many, many people - I don't know how many, but many people - and when I do teach, time comes to a stop for me. I don't look at the timepiece, the clock, or at my wristwatch. I just teach. It is a very, I don't know, for me teaching has a tremendous, a very strange impact upon me. I simply feel when I do teach Torah, I feel the breath of eternity on my face. Even now when I am old, of course, certainly not young, teaching Torah, shiurim, teaching Torah, relieves me of the fear of death, and of all the blues, depressive moments, which elderly people go through. When I do teach, I feel rejuvenated, and as if I were twenty-five or thirty years old. If not for the study and teaching of Torah, I would have lost my sanity in the year of triple aveilus in '67.[3] I was on the verge of mental collapse and breakdown. I did not. I emerged victorious, and this is due to one thing only - to, I would say, my mad dedication to Torah. I am not trying to brag or to boast; I am telling you the truth. I was hit that year and the following years; I felt somehow, because of teaching Torah, that I was not alone, that I had somebody, that somebody was invisible but I felt His presence, to confide, there was somebody on whose shoulder I could cry, and there was somebody from whom I could almost demand words of solace and comfort.

People don't know, again, and please take the proper spirit, I'm not bragging, they don't know what my schedule is. They know I say shiurim here. Alright, fine, I say three times a week in Yeshiva; even though the shiurim are an hour and a half, it never happens that I should get through the shiur in an hour and a half - so two hours, sometimes three hours, sometimes more than three hours. It is very strange. The boys who sit in my class are very young, perhaps one quarter of my age, one third of my age, but they come out exhausted, I come out refreshed. That is shiur. Then I come in to Boston, so every Friday morning from half past eight, for three hours until half past eleven, I study with my son-in-law. Saturday, believe me that I can't afford to take a nap on Saturday morning; I haven't taken a nap on Saturday morning for the last, I would say twenty years perhaps, because I study with my grandchildren. I study with Moshe three hours at least, and I study with Mayer two and a half hours. The same is Sunday, and the same is Monday. I simply, I have no time sometimes, just to sit down and to relax, simply. The study of Torah has had such a great cathartic impact upon me, as you understand it, is rooted in the wondrous experience I always have when I open up the Gemara. Somehow, when I do open up the Gemara, either alone or when I am in company, and I do teach others, I have the impression - don't call it hallucination, it is not a hallucination - I have the impression as if I heard, I would say, soft footsteps of somebody invisible, who comes in and sits down with me, sometimes looking over my shoulder. It is simply, the idea is not a mystical idea, it is the Gemara, the mishna in Avos, the Gemara in Berachos say, "[אפילו אחד יושב ועוסק בתורה שכינה שרייה]"[4] and we all believe that the nosein haTorah, the One who gave us the Torah, has never deserted the Torah, and He simply walks, He accompanies the Torah, wherever the Torah has a, let's say, a rendezvous, an appointment, a date with somebody, He is there.

Therefore, the study of Torah has never been for me a dry formal intellectual performance act, no matter how important a role the intellect plays in limud haTorah. You know very well that I place very much a great deal of emphasis upon the intellectual understanding and analysis of the halacha; you know that this is actually what my grandfather zichrono l'vracha actually introduced, and you know and I can tell you - and I told you so many times, and I will say it again - our methodology, our analysis, and our manner of conceptualizing, and inferring, and classifying, and defining things, halachic matters, does not lag behind the most modern philosophical analyses, I happen to know something about it. We are far ahead of it; the tools, the logical tools, the epistemological instruments which we employ in order to analyze a sugya in, let us say, חזקת הבתים, in הערל, or in Shabbos, or in Bava Kama, it doesn't matter, are the most modern - they are very impressive (a great share in that has my grandfather.) Anyway, we avail ourselves of the most modern methods of understanding, of constructing, of inferring, of classifying, defining, and so forth and so on. So there is no doubt that the intellect plays a tremendous role in limud haTorah.

However, talmud Torah is more than intellectual performance. It is a total, all-encompassing and all-embracing involvement - mind and heart, will and feeling, the very center of the human personality. Emotional man, logical man, voluntaristic man - all of them are involved in the study of Torah. Talmud Torah is basically, for me, an ecstatic experience, in which one meets God. And again I want to say that whatever I told you now is not just mysticism or due to my mystical inclinations; it isn't so. The Gemara says so. Chazal have equated talmud Torah with revelation; the great event, drama, of gilui shechina is reenacted, restaged, and relived, every time a Jew opens a Gemara. The Talmud in Berachos, while discussing the problem of ba'al kerai, the issur Torah of ba'al kerai, expressed itself as follows:

דתניא: והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך ... יום אשר עמדת לפני ה' אלקיך בחורב, מה להלן באימה ובריאה וברתת ובזיע אף כאן באימה ובריאה וברתת ובזיע ובריאה וברתת ובזיע ... the day that thou stood before the Lord they God at Choreiv ...[5]

The Torah did not say "make known the halachos." More than that - make known simply your rendezvous with God, which means they should experience exactly what you did experience, when you stood before thy God in Choreiv. How did the people stand before God in Choreiv? With fear, awe, and with a tremor in their heart; trembling! So must every Jew who engages in talmud Torah stand before God with fear, awe, and tremor. That's why a ba'al kerai is assur bedivrei Torah; this is the reason! It is not the tuma, but he is not in the mood to experience the presence of the Almighty, to experience revelation every time he engages in study. So if a Jew cannot experience revelation when he is busy studying, so he is assur betalmud Torah. This is the reason for ba'al kerai!

In other words, the study of the Torah is an ecstatic, metaphysical performance, and the study of the Torah is an act of surrender - this is very important. What does a Jew surrender when he studies Torah? That is why Chazal emphasized so many times the importance of humility, the importance of humility, and that the proud person can never be a great scholar, only the humble person. Why is humility necessary? Because the study of Torah means meeting the Almighty, of course, and if a finite being meets the infinite - the Almighty, the Maker of the world - of course this meeting must precipitate a mood of humility, and humility results in surrender.

What do we surrender to the Almighty? We surrender first, two things in my opinion; I'll explain. We surrender to the Almighty the every-day logic, or what I call the mercantile logic, or the logic of the businessman, or the logic of the utilitarian person; and we embrace another logic - miSinai. And secondly, we also surrender the everyday will, which is very utilitarian, very superficial, and we embrace another will - the will miSinai. And this is not, as I told you before, it's not just drush, homiletics. The Rambam, when he explains kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim in krias shema, and he explains the gemara, "למה קדמה פרשת שמע לפרשת והיה אם שמוע? שיקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים,"

6]תחילה", so the Rambam enumerates the elements of ol malchus Shamayim; it is ahavaso - love of God - yiraso - fear of God - v'talmudo - and Talmud Torah, "7]תלמודו שהוא העיקר הגדול שהכל תלוי בו" Talmud Torah is an act; talmud Torah means קבלת עול מלכות שמים. And that's the reason why talmud Torah, I mean, one must not study the Torah unless he says the birchas haTorah; this is the reason for Kaddish DeRabbanan - because talmud Torah constitutes an act of surrender, of קבלת עול מלכות שמים, of accepting the harness of mitzvos.

It is interesting that Chazal always said עול מלכות שמים. Why not קבלת מלכות שמים? Why עולמלכות שמים? What is the answer? The answer is because קבלת מלכות שמים means when malchus Shamayim is convenient, cooperates with man, when man has the impression as if malchus Shamayim is out to promote his everyday business, malchus Shamayim is good, is acceptable, even from a purely pragmatic viewpoint or purely utilitarian viewpoint. That is why Chazal have always inserted the word ol - harness. Harness means regardless of the fact that קבלת מלכות שמים is sometimes very uncomfortable, and requires of man sacrificial action, and is a heavy yoke, it is a yoke, but still the kabbala must take place.

Let me now just enumerate the aspect of עול מלכות שמים which is identical with talmud Torah. What does קבלת עול מלכות שמים require of the lomeid haTorah, of the person who studies Torah? First, we must pursue the truth, and nothing else but the truth. However, the truth in talmud Torah can be achieved through singular halachic Torah thinking and Torah understanding. The truth is attained from within, in accord with the methodology given to Moses and passed on from generation to generation. The truth can be discovered only through joining the ranks of the chochmei hamasora. It is ridiculous to say, "I have discovered something of which the Rashba didn't know, the Ketzos didn't know, the Vilna Gaon had no knowledge. I have discovered an approach to the interpretation of Torah that is completely new." It is ridiculous. One has to join the ranks of the chochmei hamasora - Chazal, Rishonim, gedolei Acharonim. One must not try to rationalize from without, the chukei haTorah and must not judge the chukim u'mishpatim in terms of a secular system of values. Such an attempt - be it historicism, be it psychologism, be it utilitarianism - undermines the very foundations of Torah umasora, and leads eventually to the most tragic consequences of assimilationism and nihilism, no matter how good the intentions are of the person who suggests it.

Second, we must not yield - I mean emotionally, it is very important - we must not feel inferior, develop or experience an inferiority complex, and because of that complex yield to the charm - usually it is a transient and passing charm - of modern political or ideological slogans. I say not only not to compromise - certainly not to compromise - but even not to yield emotionally, not to feel inferior, not to experience an inferiority complex. And it should never occur to me that it is important if we would cooperate, just a little bit, with the modern trend or with the secular, modern philosophy. In my opinion, Yahadus does not have to apologize, neither to the modern woman nor to the modern representatives of religious subjectivism. There is no need for apology. We should have pride in our masora, in our heritage. And of course, certainly, it goes without saying, one must not try to compromise with those cultural trends, and one must not try to gear the halachic norm to the transient values of a neurotic society, that is what our society is.

Third: קבלת עול מלכות שמים - which is an identical act with that of talmud Torah - requires of us to revere and to love and to admire the words of the chochmei hamasora, be they Tanna'im, be they Amora'im, be they Rishonim, I don't care. This is our prime duty. They are the final authorities. An irresponsible statement about Chazal borders - I don't like to use the word, but according to Maimonides it is - on the heretic, because the Rambam says about Tzedukim, the Rambam says who is a Tzeduki? The Rambam in perek gimel of Hilchos Teshuva, halacha cheis, " וכן הכופר בפרושה והוא תורה שבעל פה " וכן הכופר בכבודי מגידה כגון צדוק ובייתוס" 8]תהיה. It is very strange; I wanted to discuss it with my father zichrono leveracha. If he says that whoever denies the

truthfulness or the authenticity of Torah SheBe'al Peh is a Tzeduki, why did he add והמכחיש מגידה - "Whoever denies the authority of the scholars of the masora"? So apparently, the Rambam says that under the category of kofrim baTorah are classified not only those who deny, that for instance, nisuch hamayim is required or arava she'ba'Mikdash is required, or they deny the Torah SheBe'al Peh; there is no doubt about it, but moreover, even those who admit the truthfulness of the Torah SheBe'al Peh but they are critical of chachmei Chazal as personalities, who find fault in chachmei Chazal, fault in their character Rachmana litzlan, or in their behavior, in their conduct, say that chochmei Chazal were prejudiced, which actually has no impact upon the halacha - nevertheless, he is to be considered as a kofer. " וכן הכופר בפרושה " - what does it mean "והמכחיש מגידה"? He denies the perfection and the truthfulness of chachmei Chazal - not of the Torah, again, but of the chachmei Chazal as personalities, as real personae, as far as their character is concerned, their philosophy is concerned, their outlook on the world is concerned.

And let me add something, this is very important. Not only the halachos, but also the chazakos which chachmei Chazal have introduced are indestructible. We must not tamper, not only with the halachos, but even with the chazokos, for the chazokos which Chazal spoke of rest not upon transient psychological behavioral patterns, but upon permanent ontological principles rooted in the very depth of the human personality, in the metaphysical human personality, which is as changeless as the heavens above.

Let us take for instance, let's take an example, the chazaka, for instance, that's what I was told about. The chazaka "9]טב למיתב טו דו מלמיתב ארמלו" has absolutely nothing to do with the social and political status of the woman in antiquity. The chazaka is based not upon sociological factors, but upon a verse in Bereishis, " הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים ואל אישך תשוקתך והוא " - I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shall bring forth children, and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." [10] It is a metaphysical curse rooted in the feminine personality; she suffers incomparably more than the male while in solitude. Solitude to the male is not as terrible an experience, as horrifying an experience, as solitude to a woman. And this will never change, כימי השמים על הארץ, it will never change, because this is not a psychological fact; it is an existential fact. It is not due to the inferior status of the woman, but is due to the difference, the basic distinction, between the female personality and the male personality. Loneliness frightens the woman, and an old spinster's life is much more miserable and tragic than the life of an old bachelor. This was true in antiquity; it is still true, and it will be true a thousand years from now. So to say that טו דו מלמיתב ארמלו was due, or is due, to the inferior political or social status of the woman is simply misinterpreting the chazoka of טו דו מלמיתב ארמלו. And no legislation can alleviate the pain of a single woman; no legislation can change this role. She was burdened with that by the Almighty after she violated the first law.

And, let me ask you a question. Ribbono shel Olam - God Almighty - if you should start modifying and reassessing the chazokos upon which a multitude of halachos rest, you will destroy Yahadus! So instead of philosophizing, let us rather light a match and set fire to the Beis Yisrael; we will get rid of all problems!

And I also was told that it was recommended that the method of אפקעינהו רבנן [לקידושין מיניה 11] be reintroduced. If this recommendation will be accepted, I hope it will not be accepted, however if this recommendation will be accepted, then there will be no need for a get. No need for a get. " האשה " [נקנית... בכסף בשטר ובביאה... וקונה את עצמה בגט ובמיתת הבעל" 12] we will be able to cross out this mishna, this halacha; every rabbi will suspend the kiddushin. If such a privilege exists, why should this privilege be monopolized by the Rabbanus HaRoshis of Eretz Yisrael? Why couldn't the Rabbinical Assembly do just as well as the Rabbanus HaRoshis, if the problem is אפקעינהו רבנן לקידושין מיניה?! Ribbono d'alma kula, what are you out, to destroy everything?! I will tell you frankly, I will be relieved of two

masechtos. I will not have to say shiurim on Gittin and Kiddushin, and then Yevamos as well.

And I want to be frank and open. Do you expect to survive as Orthodox rabbis? Or, do you expect to carry on the masora under such circumstances? Curse will replace the Torah. I hope that those who are present here will join me in simply objecting to such symposia and to such discussions and debate at the rabbinical convention. When I was told about it, I thought, "Would it be possible?" I cannot imagine that at the Republican National Convention or Democratic National Convention, should we introduce a symposium on whether communism and democracy, perhaps communism should replace democracy in the United States. Could you imagine such a possibility? I can not. Because there is a certain system of postulates to which people are committed, and such a discussion, at the National Convention of the Republican Party, would be outside the system of postulates to which the American people are committed to. And to speak about changing the halachos of Chazal is, of course, is at least as nonsensical as discussing communism at the Republican National Convention. It is discussing self-destruction, a method of self-destruction and suicide.

I know; you don't have to tell it to me because, בתוך עמי אנכי יושב, I don't live in an ivory tower, I don't live in a fool's paradise. I know that modern life is very complex. I know your problems; many of your problems are passed on to me. We are confronted with horrible problems - social, political, cultural, and economic. Problems of the family, problems of the community, and problems of society in general. We feel, and I sometimes feel like you, as if we are swimming against the tide; the tide is moving rapidly, with tremendous force, in the opposite direction of which we are moving. I feel it, I know that - you don't have to tell it to me. The crowd, the great majority, has deserted us, and cares for nothing. I know the danger of let's say ta'aruvos - of weddings, of church weddings, in which a Jew or a Jewess united in marriage by a priest and a Reform rabbi. I know all of that. We are facing an awesome challenge, and I am mindful of all that. I don't live, as I told you, in a fool's paradise. However, if you think that the solution lies in the reformist philosophy, or in an extraneous interpretation of the Halacha, you are badly mistaken. It is self-evident; many problems are unsolvable, you can't help it. For instance, the problem of these two mamzerim in Eretz Yisrael - you can't help it. All we have is the institution of mamzer. No one can abandon it - neither the Rav HaRoshi, nor the Rosh HaGola. It cannot be abandoned. It is a pasuk in Chumash: "13]. לא יבא ממזר בקהל ה'." It is very tragic; the midrash already spoke about it, "14]. והנה דמעת העשוקים", but it's a reality, it's a religious reality. If we say to our opponents or to the dissident Jews, "That is our stand" - they will dislike us, they will say that we are inflexible, we are ruthless, we are cruel, but they will respect us. But however, if you try to cooperate with them or even if certain halachic schemes are introduced from within, I don't know, you would not command love, you would not get their love, and you will certainly lose their respect. That is exactly what happened in Eretz Yisrael! What can we do? This is Toras Moshe and this is surrender. This is קבלת עול מלכות שמים. We surrender.

The Torah summons the Jew to live heroically. We cannot allow an eishes ish, no matter how tragic the case is, to remarry without a get. We cannot permit a giyores to marry a kohen, and sometimes the cases are very tragic, I know from my own experience. I had a case in Rochester, with a gentile girl, she became a giyores, the woman became a giyores, before she met the boy. She was a real giyores hatzedek; she did not join our fold because she wanted to marry somebody - giyores hatzedek. And then she met the Jewish boy. He came from an alienated background, had absolutely no knowledge of Yahadus. She brought him close to Yahadus, and they got engaged, and he visited the cemetery - since he came closer to Yahadus, he wanted to find out about his family, about his family tree, so he visited the cemetery in which his grandfather was buried, and he saw a strange symbol - ten fingers like that. So they began to ask; he thought it was a mystical symbol. So he discovered that he is a kohen. What can you do? This is the halacha, that the

kohen is assur b'giyores. I know the problem. We surrender to the will of the Almighty.

On the other hand, to say that the Halacha is not sensitive to problems and not responsive to the needs of the people, is an outright falsehood. The Halacha is responsive to the needs of both the community and the individual. But the Halacha has its own orbit, moves at a certain definitive speed, has its own pattern of responding to a challenge, its own criteria and principles. And I come from a rabbinic house; it is called beis harav, the house into which I was born, and believe me, Rav Chaim used to try his best to be a meikil. However, there were limits even to Rav Chaim's skills. When you reach the boundary line, it is all you can say: "I surrender to the will of the Almighty." There is a sadness in my heart, and I share in the suffering of the poor woman, who was instrumental in bringing him back to the fold, and then she had to lose him. She lost him; she walked away. This is why the Rambam says that talmud Torah is identical to קבלת עול מלכות שמים.

To speak about Halacha as a fossil, Rachmana litzlan, is ridiculous. Because we know, those who study Halacha know, it is a living, dynamic discipline which was given to man in order to redeem him and to save him. We are opposed to shinuyim (changes), of course, but chiddush is certainly the very essence of Halacha. There are no shinuyim in Halacha, but there are great chiddushim.[15] But chiddushim are within the system, not from the outside! You cannot psychologize Halacha, historicize Halacha, or rationalize Halacha, because this is something foreign, something extraneous.

As a matter of fact, not only Halacha. Can you psychologize mathematics? I will ask you a question about mathematics; let us take Euclidian geometry. I can give many psychological explanations of why Euclid said that two parallels do not cross, or the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. If I were a psychologist, I could interpret it in psychological terms. Would it change the postulate, the mathematical postulate? And Marah d'alma Kula - Almighty God - when it comes to Torah, which is from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, all the instruments of psychology, history, and utilitarian morality are being used in order to undermine the very authority of the Halacha. The human being is invited to be creative, inventive, and engage in inspiring research from within, but not from without. Instead of complaining against the inflexibility of Halacha, let us expose, let us explore its endless spaces, and enjoy talmud Torah, and find in talmud Torah a redemptive, cathartic, and inspiring reality.

Footnotes

[1] This is a transcript of remarks by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l which preceeded a shiur to RIETS rabbinic alumni in 1975. The audio is available https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/767722/Rabbi_Joseph_B_Soloveitchik/Genus_&_Mes_Orah_-_Part_1. Light magazine printed a synopsis of this address in November 1975 using the title, "Surrendering to Almighty." In 2013, a lightly edited transcription was posted at <http://arikahn.blogspot.com/2013/03/rabbi-soloveitchik-talmud-torah-and.html> under the title, "Talmud Torah and Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim". The text we are presenting to the reader here is a more precise transcription which includes additions and corrections compared to the aforementioned versions.

[2] Sanhedrin 97b

[3] In 1967, the Rav lost his mother, his wife, and his brother.

[4] Avos 3:6; Berachos 6a.

[5] Berachos 20a.

[6] Berachos 13a.

[7] Hilchos Krias Shema 1:2.

[8] Hilchos Teshuva 3:8.

[9] Yevamos 118b; Kesubos 75a; Kiddushin 7a, 41a; Bava Kama 111a.

[10] Bereishis 3:16.

[11] Yevamos 90b, 110a; Kesubos 3a; Gittin 33a, 73a; Bava Basra 48b.

[12] Kiddushin 1:1.

[13] Devarim 23:3.

[14] See Koheles 4:1 and Medrash Rabbah ad loc.

[15]The preceding section of text ("the house into which I was born..." through "...but there are great chiddushim") appears in the text posted here, but the audio for this section is missing/earsed in all the versions of the recording we could find. The text does, however, correspond to basic ideas reported at the same point of the address in Light magazine and seemed accurate/plausible to Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a, so we have included it here.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Pekudei
For the week ending 9 March 2019 / 2 Adar II 5779
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Remember to Forget

"These are the reckonings..." (38:21)

Every year on erev Rosh Hashana, Rabbi Stephen Ammon's wife would go to her mother's grave at the Staten Island Jewish Cemetery. One year she knew that she wouldn't be able to go, but it happened that a couple of weeks before Rosh Hashana she was driving with her husband past the freeway exit to the cemetery. Seeing as they were so close, Rabbi Ammon suggested that they turn off and go. They pulled off the freeway and drove to the cemetery. It was completely deserted. They were able to pull up right by the grave. They prayed there for a while. Rabbi Ammon was waiting for his wife to finish praying when he turned around and noticed that a hearse and a couple of cars had pulled up at an open grave a couple of rows behind them. One of the funeral party came over and asked if Rabbi Ammon could be "a tenth man" so they could say Kaddish. "Sure!" said Rabbi Ammon. He went over, helped them put the coffin into the grave, and they said Kaddish. After that they started leaving. Rabbi Ammon said, "One minute. You didn't bury him!" "Oh, don't worry," they said, "we got the tractor to do that. We don't do that." And they left.

Rabbi Ammon suddenly remembered learning in yeshiva that the concept of met mitzvah — literally "a mitzvah of the dead" — doesn't apply only when you find a dead person someplace and there is no one else to bury the body. Rather, this important concept also applies when the burial is left incomplete. So he went over to the person driving the tractor and said, "Would you mind lending me a shovel? I'll do the burial for you. You can go and I'll bury the person." The tractor driver said he didn't mind, and Rabbi Ammon set about the mitzvah of bringing a Jew to Kever Yisrael, to a Jewish burial. Rabbi Ammon spent an hour-and-a-half completing the burial until the grave was completely full. He was just about to stick the grave marker in the ground when he paused, took note of the name, and wrote it down. The entire way driving to Brooklyn he was thinking to himself, "Why, why, why?" Why had he just happened to be there? Why out of the blue did this hearse turn up in a deserted graveyard and he just happened to be "number ten"? And why was he the one to end up burying him? Rabbi Ammon decided to make some enquiries and find out who this person was.

One of the people whom Rabbi Ammon called was his mentor, Rabbi Herman Neuberger (zatzal), the executive director of Ner Yisrael Yeshiva — the yeshiva Rabbi Ammon went to. When he told Rabbi Neuberger the name, the Rabbi almost dropped the phone. Rabbi Neuberger told Rabbi Ammon that 40 years previously, when Rabbi Ammon was a young boy and had enrolled in the yeshiva, his father couldn't meet the expense of keeping him there, and so Rabbi Neuberger tried to find someone who could sponsor the young Rabbi Ammon. Rabbi Neuberger said over the phone, "The person you just buried was the very same person who paid for all of your years in the yeshiva."

Rabbi Ammon suddenly remembered that one of the sections of the Talmud that he had learned in Ner Yisrael was the sugya of met mitzvah. "These are the accountings..."

In the liturgy of the Rosh Hashana service, we say that G-d "remembers all that is forgotten." Rabbi Yisrael of Rhizhin said, "When you forget, G-d remembers, but when you remember, G-d forgets." This means that when you remind everyone of all the favors you did for them, G-d "forgets," so to speak. He says, "Well, if you remember so well, I can forget about it!" But if you "forget" — if you don't remind people that they owe you because you did something good for them — then G-d remembers and takes care of all your accountings, down to the last shovel full of earth.

§ Sources: heard from Rabbi Yoel God

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas - Parshas Vayakhel

Up Close and Personal

These final portions in the Book of Exodus summarize the amazing accomplishments of the Children of Israel in building the Mishkan — the edifice that would house the Divine presence in this temporal world — while in the desert. It was a mammoth feat, an act that consumed an entire nation. Men and women, young and old each had a share in this great endeavor. The Torah tells us: "Every man whose heart inspired him came; and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of Hashem for the work of the Tent of Meeting, for all its labor and for the sacred vestments. The men came with the women; everyone whose heart motivated him brought bracelets, nose-rings, rings, body ornaments — all sorts of gold ornaments — every man who raised up an offering of gold to Hashem." (Exodus 35:21-22)

And then there were those who did the work. "Moses summoned Bezalel, Oholiab, and every wise-hearted man whose heart Hashem endowed with wisdom, everyone whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it (Exodus 36:2). The wording needs clarification. Why use the term, "whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it"? Why not just say "whose heart inspired him, to do the work"? What is the meaning of coming close to do the work? Just do the work!

The lines outside of Rav Elozar Menachem Shach's apartment in B'nai Beraq were always long. Visitors came from across the nation and the world to speak to the eldest sage in Israel. Young and old, wealthy and poor waited in the corridor of the tiny apartment in order to gain either wisdom, advice, counsel or blessing from the revered sage.

One evening after almost everyone had left, a wealthy North American philanthropist was about to enter the study to speak to Rav Shach concerning an important matter. Before entering the study he noticed a father clutching the hand of a school-aged child no more than eleven years old.

"Please, sir," interrupted the father. "It is difficult for my child to sit still in class. Talmud seems to bore him. Please let me enter before you. I just want a quick blessing from the rabbi that my son should develop an interest in Torah learning." It seemed innocuous enough. The wealthy man had already waited quite a while and he figured that another minute or two for Rav Shach to shake the boy's hand, give him a blessing, and send him on his way could not take that long, and so, he agreed.

It was almost 45 minutes before the child left Rav Shach's apartment. The boy and his father were both beaming enthusiastically. Then they spotted the benevolent man who allowed them to go ahead. He was baffled. "What happened in there?" He asked. "Why did his blessing take so long?"

The father of the young boy began to explain. "We entered the room expecting a brocha and a handshake. But Rav Shach told us that we didn't

need his blessing. He asked my son what he is learning. Then he took out that Tractate and sat down with him. He learned a Mishna with my son until he understood it. Then the Rashi. Then the Gemara. Then more Rashi. Then a Tosefos. It was not long before my son and the revered Rosh Yeshiva became entangled in excited Talmudic repertoire!

“The Rosh Yeshiva explained to us that all you need is to get close to the Gemara, draw yourself to it. Then it will grasp you and embrace you! You don’t need a blessing to enjoy it. You must draw yourself close to it and then you will enjoy it!”

Building a Mishkan, like any project that entails difficult work for the sake of Heaven, can be arduous. It can become depressing at times and it is easy to become dispirited and desperate. The key to the success of the building Mishkan lies in the words of the posuk, “everyone whose heart inspired him, to come close to the work, to do it.” In order to do the work, you must draw yourself close to the work. If you take small steps with love and bring a project close to your heart, then rest assured you will complete the work in joy!

Dedicated by Lionel and Ruth Fisch in memory of George Fisch and Rebecca Stein

Good Shabbos

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Pekudei

We Toil and Receive Reward — For the Toil!

Parshas Pikudei concludes the construction of the Mishkan. After the construction of all the individual components of the Mishkan, the parts were brought to Moshe. Rashi quotes the Medrash Tanchuma that explains that the Mishkan was brought to Moshe because everyone else was unable assemble it. The Mishkan was simply too heavy for anyone to lift. Since Moshe had not been personally involved in any part of the construction of the Mishkan, HaShem [G-d] reserved the privilege of final assembly for him. When HaShem told Moshe to assemble the Mishkan, Moshe protested that it was too heavy for him to lift, as well. HaShem told Moshe to make the effort. “Make it look like you are trying to erect it.” Moshe made the effort, and miraculously, it assembled itself. Since Moshe made the effort, he received the credit for having put it up.

Rav Meir Rubman explains that we can learn a very important insight regarding spirituality from this Medrash. The Medrash teaches us that regardless of the difficulty of the task, we must make the effort. In other areas of endeavor, a person only gets credit for producing. However, when it comes to Judaism, HaShem is not necessarily interested in results; He is interested in the effort.

The concept that a person receives an “A” for effort is usually a backhanded compliment. In actuality, you received a “D” – a near failing grade, but at least you received an “A” for effort. That is the way it is in other areas of life. However, by Mitzvos, all Hashem asks from us is that we make the effort. Whether the task is actually accomplished or not is often out of our control and up to Hashem.

At the conclusion of a Mesechta [tractate of the Talmud], we say the prayer “We toil and they toil. We toil and receive reward and they toil and do not receive reward.” What does it mean, “they toil and do not receive reward”?

This does not seem to be a true statement. People do not work without receiving payment!

The answer is that when we work (at religious tasks), we receive pay for the effort, regardless of whether or not we produce. However, ‘they’ only receive pay for the bottom line. In all other areas of endeavor, toil that does not produce results does not receive reward.

Not long ago (1992), I was in Atlanta for a Torah retreat. Atlanta is an amazing community. Thirty years ago, they did not have a minyan [quorum] of Sabbath observers. Today, over 300 people come to shul on Shabbos — all of them are in some stage of having intensified, and intensifying, their observance of mitzvos.

I asked Rabbi Emanuel Feldman (Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Jacob in Atlanta), “What is the key to your success?” Rabbi Feldman told me that the key is to try to plant seeds. That is all a Rabbi can do. He can try to nurture and water the seeds, but really all he can do is try. He never knows for sure whether or not his efforts will succeed.

For example, one individual who recently returned to intensive Jewish involvement and observance told Rabbi Feldman that he made his decision because of a Yom Kippur sermon that Rabbi Feldman delivered fifteen years earlier. A comment in that sermon had struck home. He did not act upon it then, but fifteen years later, he decided to become religious.

Success is not the correct measure. Kiruv Rechokim is about effort. Whether or not the Mishkan is actually erected is HaShem’s worry. We toil and we receive reward – for the effort.

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Mishkan, Mikdash and Moses

Rabbi Ilan Goldman

אלה פקודי המשכן משכן העדות אשר פקד על פי משה

‘These are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted at the word of Moshe’[1].

This opening pasuk of Parashat Pekudei appears to be repetitive, with the first mention of the Mishkan seeming unnecessary. Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma[2], which teaches that the double mention of the word Mishkan is a hint to the Beit HaMikdash, which was taken as collateral (in Hebrew, משכון) in its two destructions for the sins of Israel.

A different Midrash[3] teaches that had Moshe been the one to lead Am Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, the people would never have sinned. And had they not sinned they would never have been exiled and the Mikdash would still be standing today. But since it was not Moshe who led the people into Israel, they did eventually sin and they were exiled and the first and second Batei Mikdash were destroyed. משה על פי משה, therefore, hints to his sin at the rock, for it was due to words from his mouth that he did not enter and lead Am Yisrael into the Land.

The Sochochov Rebbe, in his book, Shem MiShmuel[4], explains that the word Mikdash is used for what Am Yisrael sanctifies through its own efforts. The word Mishkan is used for where Hashem’s Divine presence dwells: וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִשְׁכָּן וְאֶשְׁכְּנֵם בְּתוֹכָם, ‘They shall make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell among them’[5]. When it is the people who need to be active and build it is called a Mikdash. When it is Hashem’s doing, of dwelling within us, it is called Mishkan – וְאֶשְׁכְּנֵם.

The Sochochov Rebbe therefore concludes that the Mishkan was never destroyed but was rather concealed. However, the Mikdash, which depended on the people was therefore dependent on their behavior and thus sin could lead to its destruction.

Nevertheless, the Shechinah never fully leaves Am Yisrael. The bricks and stones of the Mikdash can be destroyed but Hashem never stops dwelling

within His people, even if He only dwells in a less noticeable fashion. This too is related to Moshe. The Midrash[6] tells of how when everything was ready, everyone tried to erect the Mishkan and yet failed to do so. They then turned to Moshe and asked him to do it, and he single-handedly succeeded. On the one hand the erection of the Mishkan is related to Moshe and on the other hand the pasuk before suggests that Hashem erected it. If Hashem erected the Mishkan then why did a human need to as well, and if so why Moshe?

The Mishkan was Hashem's dwelling within us, and not dependent on any man. However, it also required some action from below, and this action could only be done by Moshe – firstly because it had to be someone who understood how the Divine can reside in this world, and secondly because through the act of Moshe erecting the Mishkan, the Shechinah would come down and never fully leave.

This Dvar Torah is by By Rabbi Ilan Goldman, former Rav-Shaliach, Bnei Akiva England, currently Executive Director, Project Aseret and head of Student Beit Midrash, Lod.

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Pekudei

פרשת פקודי תשל"ט

אלה פקודי המשכן

These are the accountings of the Mishkan. (38:21)

The Torah dedicates four parshiyos to details of the construction of the Mishkan, its keilim, utensils, and the Bigdei Kehunah, Priestly vestments, worn by the Kohanim when they performed the avodah, service, in the Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash. Both Parashas Vayakhel and Parashas Pekudei recap the many contributions and utensils required for the construction of the Mishkan. All of this was for the place in which Hashem's Shechinah, Divine Presence, would repose here on earth. Basking in the Shechinah's Presence would seem to be the penultimate experience. Coming to Yerushalayim just to be in the Holy City, near the Bais Hamikdash, would appear to take precedence over anything else. Yet, Chazal teach that the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim, welcoming/reaching out to wayfarers (or anyone else who is in need of a place to rest, a meal, a warm conversation), takes precedence even over being mekabel Pnei HaShechinah, receiving the Divine Presence. This incredible idea is derived from the actions of our Patriarch, Avraham Avinu, who, while in midst of a conversation with Hashem, excused himself and went to tend to the needs of his guests. A Jew in need takes priority over everything.

What is it about providing hospitality that gives it such extraordinary status? Why did Avraham beg Hashem's "indulgence" while he went to tend to the needs of his guests? When Avraham did this, he essentially committed two acts that beg elucidation: he interrupted his visit from Hashem, something which is clearly beyond our ability to understand; he taught that tending to guests takes precedence over the experience of speaking with Hashem! Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, quotes the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 4:22, which teaches: "One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is worth more than a life of eternity in the World-to-Come." Hashem has placed us in this world for a purpose: to serve Him. This act of service is of greater value than any spiritual revelations that can be garnered either in this world or even in Olam Habba. Carrying out a mitzvah is of utmost significance and value. It is greater than studying Torah, reflecting upon Hashem's greatness, or even receiving the Shechinah. Regardless of the activity in which he is engaged, he must drop it to perform a mitzvah.

[This does not negate Torah study as a mitzvah. I think the Mashgiach seems to be distinguishing between a mitzvah which focuses upon one's own personal spiritual advancement and a mitzvah which involves reaching out to and helping others. While the study of Torah benefits the entire universe, the immediate focus is on the individual's personal ascendency.]

Rav Wolbe relates that Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was once reciting Shema when he overheard two people arguing over whose obligation it was to bury someone who had passed away. (Personally, I am not sure why such people should be serving on the Chevra Kaddisha, Jewish Burial Society. It is a sacred privilege to be a member of this august group of volunteers. One who considers this work a burden obviously does not understand the meaning of "sacred" or "privilege.") Immediately, Rav Yisrael, the venerable founder of the mussar, ethical character refinement, movement, removed his Tefillin and ran to bury the man. Despite the fact that he was in the middle of davening, praying, reciting Shema, and that it was not his personal responsibility to attend to the burial of the deceased, Rav Yisrael moved without hesitancy. He was a man of action who did not pause even for a moment when it involved the performance of a mitzvah.

One Yom Kippur, while Rav Wolbe was a student studying in the Mirrer Yeshivah in Europe, prior to Mussaf the chazzan sent a number of students to check on the welfare of one of the boys who was ill. "This is the obligation of the day," declared the chazzan. In other words, we are placed on this world to do, to act, to perform mitzvos. Performing a mitzvah (especially if it involves attending to both the physical and emotional needs of someone) takes precedence over davening on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.

How often do we become inspired by a good speech, a great shiur – and then what? How long does the inspiration last? We must immediately concretize our emotions by turning them into actions, thereby achieving more than one who has the unparalleled opportunity to speak with the Shechinah!

בקע לגלגלת מחצית השקל בשקל הקדש לכל העבר על הפקדים

A beka for every head, a half-shekel to the sacred shekel for everyone who passed through the census takers. (38:26)

So many people contributed towards the Mishkan. One might think that due to the sheer numbers of contributors, the individual contribution/contributor would become lost in the shuffle. Such thoughts are the result of a small mind or limited cognitive ability. Nothing is insignificant in the eyes of Hashem. Indeed, this is true concerning all spirituality. Everything counts. One never knows what good can result from a single act of spirituality. The following vignettes underscore this idea.

A young Kollel fellow maintained an outreach program out of a small shul in central Eretz Yisrael. He was extremely dedicated to his mission and was quite successful at it. One day, a young, assimilated college student visited his shul and requested an overview of Judaism. He was obviously a bright young man, evidenced by the fact that he was enrolled in a fellowship program in one of the country's most prestigious schools. He was a physics major. He clearly presented himself as a level-headed, highly intelligent young man who was sincerely interested in finding out about Judaism. After an hour of presenting cogent questions and receiving satisfactory answers, he appeared satisfied with what he had learned about the Jewish religion. This young man was, of course, Jewish, but assimilated. As an Israeli, he knew how to read Hebrew, but he was at a total loss with regard to navigating his way through the siddur. When the shul members came to daven Minchah, he asked to join them. Not knowing his way around the siddur, his recital of the Shemoneh Esrai took a bit longer than that of the rest of the congregants, as he read every word: Yaaleh v'yavo, nacheim, Aneinu, Al HaNissim/Purim, Chanukah, etc. His sincerity compensated for his lack of knowledge.

Finally, after Minchah, the Kollel fellow inquired of his newly-found student what had catalyzed/ inspired his visit. He explained the

following: “One day, as I was returning home from school, I was sitting on an Eged bus and reading the daily newspaper. Suddenly, I noticed an observant Jew bend down on the floor to pick up a soiled piece of bread (probably left by a child) and hold it in his hand for the duration of his ride. As we both alighted from the bus at the same stop, I asked the man, ‘Why did you pick up that soiled piece of bread and hold it in your hand until now (when he put it into a garbage bin)?’ He explained that he had acted in accordance with Halachah that requires one not to permit food to be defiled, but rather, he should pick it up and put it in its proper place. I was so impressed with his response that I felt it behooved me to learn more about Judaism.”

On the next visit to the shul, the student brought a few of his friends with him who were quite distant from anything Jewish. Indeed, the school that they attended was staffed by professors whose love for observance did not exist. It all started with a Jew picking up a soiled piece of bread. This served as the catalyst for a group of assimilated young Jews to return to their roots. One small step engendered the spiritual deliverance of a group of lost Jews. We should never belittle the little things that people do. What may be small to us is quite large on the spiritual screen.

Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita, relates the story of a critically ill man who required serious life-saving surgery. The earliest possible time when it could be performed was on Shabbos. Since his life was in danger, the sick man agreed to have the surgery take place on Shabbos. The procedure required a 500 dollar co-pay, which the surgeon insisted the man sign for payment prior to surgery. Otherwise, the procedure would not be performed. The patient replied that the surgeon would have to accept his word concerning payment, since signing a paper was not included in the halachic dispensation of pikuach nefesh, life-threatening deeds. In other words, chillul Shabbos, Shabbos desecration, could occur in order to save a life, but signing a contract was not part of the life-saving process.

The surgeon was adamant, refusing to perform the surgery unless he saw a signature on the contract. When the Jew saw that it was either sign his name or lose out on the surgery, he acquiesced to sign the contract. Instead of writing chameish meios, 500, however, he wrote elef, 1000. The surgeon asked, “Why did you obligate yourself to pay 1000 dollars when all I wanted was 500 dollars?” The patient’s response should inspire us all, “I did not want to write two words when I could get by with one. The money? I would rather lose 500 dollars than add to my Shabbos desecration.”

When the surgeon heard this, he was so impressed at a fellow Jew’s love for the institution of Shabbos (that he was prepared to lose money not to write an extra word) that this act of conviction catalyzed the surgeon’s personal journey of spiritual return to Judaism. One small act, an act which “some” might view as insignificant, changed future generations.

ויביאו את המשכן אל משה

And they brought the Mishkan to Moshe. (39:33)

Rashi explains that the people came to Moshe Rabbeinu with a problem: They had formed all of the Mishkan’s components, but they just could not seem to erect it. Whatever they did – did not endure. Apparently, Hashem wanted Moshe to put the finishing touch on the Mishkan. Rashi teaches that Moshe had previously not been involved in either contributing towards nor constructing the Mishkan. Hashem gave him the opportunity to put the finishing touch on their work. Indeed, without him their work would have been for naught, because it could not achieve viability until it was standing erect.

Furthermore, on his own, Moshe was unable to raise the Mishkan, because of the weight of the Kerashim, beams. Hashem told Moshe to “involve yourself (engage in erecting the Mishkan), and it will appear as if you are erecting it.” In other words, nothing is set up on its own. We always need Hashem.

Perhaps we can derive a deeper lesson from Hashem’s insistence that Moshe be the one to raise the Mishkan. When Hashem called for contributions for the Mishkan, everyone came forward to offer his contribution. When Hashem asked for skilled artisans to construct the Mishkan’s components, those who felt competent came forward. Now that the work was all done and the Mishkan was about to be raised, a setback seemed to impede the seamless progression from dream to reality. Hashem wanted Moshe to assume the administration of the final phase. Why?

There is an important message here for all future generations – not just concerning the Mishkan. Money – regardless of the sanctity of its source – does not create an enduring Sanctuary, Torah-oriented edifice, organization or endeavor. The spiritual component which the Torah leader provides determines its durability. The material component is critical, but, without Torah, it will not endure.

To take it one step further, the contributions – the tzedakah, charity, generosity of Jews – represent their acts of chesed. Torah supersedes chesed. Torah guides chesed. Acts of lovingkindness which are neither built upon nor inspired by Torah guidance, lack spiritual integrity, and, to a certain extent, are flawed.

Furthermore, the “Moshes” of each generation are acutely aware that every endeavor achieves fruition only through Hashem. Just as Moshe was told to “involve himself by lifting the beams,” and Hashem would do the rest, likewise, the Torah authority knows that he is simply a figurehead. Hashem pulls the strings; He makes it work. The individuals who so generously contribute the funds might be carried away with their material abundance, to the point that they think that they are in charge. Hashem asserts the opposite. They facilitate, but Hashem creates reality.

ויקם משה את המשכן... וישם את מכסה האהל עליו מלמעלה כאשר צוה ד' את משה
Moshe erected the Mishkan... and he put the cover of the Tent-spread on it from above as Hashem commanded Moshe. (40:18,19)

Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who raised the Mishkan, assembling it in accordance with Hashem’s command. Betzalel was the architect of the Mishkan, preparing its parts and vessels, so that Moshe could erect it. Why Moshe? Why not Betzalel? Why not Aharon? It is not as if they did not have a vested interest in seeing the finished product. To Betzalel, it would mean that he had carried out Hashem’s Will to build the Mishkan in order to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, during which his grandfather had been murdered. Aharon HaKohen played a role in the creation of the Golden Calf. He certainly wanted a sign that he was forgiven. Allowing him to erect the Mishkan would have been a meaningful sign that he had been absolved. Instead, Hashem gave Moshe this honor.

The Midrash (Tanchuma Pekudei, 11) teaches that all of the following made the attempt to raise up the Mishkan: the chachmei lev, wise men, whose extraordinary skill allowed them to make the Mishkan’s component parts; Betzalel and his partner Ohaliav. None succeeded in constructing the Mishkan in a way that it would remain standing. Why? The Midrash explains that Moshe was anguished over the fact that he had not played a role in the creation of the Mishkan. He had not contributed funds for the Mishkan. He had not worked on its creation. Hashem said, “Moshe, since you were anguished over not having played a role of any kind in the construction of the Mishkan, therefore, you will be the one to raise it.” Moshe said to Hashem, “But I do not know how to raise it (given that no one else could). Hashem responded to Moshe, “You stand there and involve yourself (act as if you are raising it up) in setting it up. It will appear as if you are the one doing it. (Actually, it was Hashem Who did it, because its component parts were impossible to lift).

The Tanchuma reveals a novel lesson to us. Moshe did not contribute to the Mishkan. Everyone gave – but Moshe. Certainly, he had the means. Why was he excluded? The Nesiim, Princes, waited too long to give. Their money was no longer required. Surely, this cannot be said concerning Moshe.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, explains that from the very onset, Moshe was not included in the command to contribute towards the Mishkan. He was instructed to take contributions from them – the people. He, however, was not told to give! Why should Moshe, our leader, not have been encouraged to play a role – from the very beginning – in the creation of the Mishkan?

Rav Heyman observes that the source of the gold, silver etc. that the people contributed toward the Mishkan was Egypt – specifically, the Egyptians, who, during the three days of darkness, were only too happy to “lend” their precious metals and jewelry to the Jewish people. This was all part of the Divine Plan to compel the Egyptians to pay for enslaving the Jewish people for 210 years. Hashem had promised that, “afterwards, they will leave with great wealth” (Bereishis 15:14). We cannot ignore the fact that the component parts of the Mishkan were intrinsically connected to the enslavement of the Jewish People. The Mishkan/edifice essentially stood as a testament before Hashem to the affliction which the Jews suffered in Egypt.

A number of “reminders” before Hashem are incorporated in Jewish practice that are worthy of note. (The Mishkan is one of them.) The Kohen does not enter the Kodosh HaKedoshim, Holy of Holies, wearing gold vestments, because gold brings the sin of the Golden Calf to mind. A human being forgets. Hashem never forgets. Even a one-time infraction becomes forever etched in the spiritual cosmos. If gold served as a reminder of sin, certainly the precious metals used for the Mishkan betoken the bitter affliction to which the Jews were subjected.

Likewise, we ask Hashem to consider the “ashes” of Yitzchak Avinu (as if they had been there, since it had been the Patriarch’s intention to go through with the Akeidah). Remembering the Akeidah serves as an incredible z’chus, merit, for Klal Yisrael. Furthermore, the livnas ha’sapir, sapphire brick, is beneath the Kisei HaKavod, Throne of Glory, which Hashem keeps stored before Him as a remembrance of the Egyptian bondage.

Thus, suggests Rav Heyman, it is appropriate to say that Moshe had been excluded from contributing to the Mishkan for this specific reason. The Mishkan recalls the slavery, in which Moshe did not take part. One might ask why the shevet, tribe, of Levi had been included in the Mishkan. They, too, had not been enslaved, because someone had to maintain the bond with the Torah. Since shevet Levi learned throughout the shibud, bondage, they had not been enslaved. Nonetheless, their children, just like the children of the other tribes, had been thrown into the Nile. They may not have labored, but they certainly suffered.

Moshe was the Rabban Shel kol Yisrael, the quintessential Rebbe of the Jewish People. Leadership positions are never easy, and certainly not worth the “fringe benefits” that result from holding them. Nonetheless, after all is said and done, the leader stands on a different plane – one that distinguishes him from the people. When the people suffer, the leader suffers with them – but only in spirit. He is not in the trenches experiencing the danger, suffering the pangs of anxiety, as do his people. He carries his responsibility with great concern, but, nonetheless, he does not suffer the way they do. He emerges as the hero of the campaign, despite the fact that he has not experienced the campaign in the same manner as did his people. His victory is different from theirs. Therefore, the celebrations and rewards are also different.

Va’ani Tefillah

ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב

V’l’Yerushalayim Ircha b’rachamim tashuv. And to Yerushalayim, Your city, You should return with compassion.

We ask Hashem to return to Yerushalayim, but actually He has never fully left. When Hashem destroyed the Bais Hamikdash, He did not make a total and final departure from Eretz Yisrael. The Gaon, zl, m’Vilna, says that Hashem’s holiness, which He dedicated to Yerushalayim, remains there. We plead with Him to return in such a manner that His imminence will

be felt. We know that we are not worthy of His making His Presence felt in the same manner that it was in times of old, when the Bais Hamikdash was in full capacity. We ask that He return in some measure, so that we can yearn for His complete Presence. As long as Hashem’s Presence remains to some degree, our relationship with Him is sufficient for us to relate to Him. If chas v’shalom, Heaven forbid, His entire Presence would disappear, we would be unable to relate to Him, thus leaving us bereft of the ability to yearn for His return. Without yearning, we certainly have no hope for return. This is the meaning of this blessing.

In memory of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

ר' נפתלי מכאל בן נתנאל ז"ל

מרת שרה ריבע בת ר' יעקב מאיר הכהן ז"ל

The Rothner Family

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Mishloach Manot Delivered by Drone

Q: If someone sends a Mishloach Manot by a drone does he fulfill the Mitzvah?

A: It is permissible, just as it is permissible to send a Mishloach Manot by a non-Jew or child, but one must be certain it arrives. See Piskei Teshuvot 695:16 (and see Chidushei Chatam Sofer on Gittin 22:2 d.h. Ve-Ha Lav).

Tefilah in Meah Shearim

Q: I am a soldier in uniform passing through Meah Shearim and I need to Daven Minchah. Should I Daven there or is it dangerous?

A: It is not dangerous. The crazy people there are extremely small in number.

Name Change of Sick Person who Died

Q: My mother z"l was extremely sick and we add the name "Chaya" to her name. She died a few days later. Should we include the additional name in the prayer Kel Malei Rachamim, on the tombstone, etc.?

A: No. The name remains only if one lived a month after it was added (See Shut Yad Sofer 1:2).

Musical Instruments during Davening

Q: In my Shul they began playing instruments during the Davening on Rosh Chodesh and Chol Ha-Moed. They said it is to elevate the Davening. I quietly left. Am I correct?

A: You are correct. We should certainly elevate the Davening, but through Yirat Shamayim - Fear of Heaven.

Anonymous Donation

Q: I want to donate books to my Shul in memory of a loved one. Am I obligated to write in the book the name of the person for whom it is donated?

A: No. Hashem knows.

Arm Tefilin for Person with Heart on Right side

Q: I am a Cardiologist. There are some people who have their heart on the right side. Do they then put the arm Tefilin on their right arms so it will be facing the heart?

A: No. 1. When the Gemara in Menachot (37a-b) says that the Tefilin should face the heart, it refers to the location of the Tefilin on the arm. 2. A left-handed person puts Tefilin on his right arm even though his heart is on the left side (Shut Eretz Tzvi 1:115. Shaarei Halachah of Ha-Rav Zev Dov

Slonim, who served as Rabbi of Mercaz Ha-Ir in Yerushalayim, Volume 1 #27).

Davening in Ezrat Nashim

Q: Can I Daven in the Ezrat Nashim when no women are there?

A: No. 1. In general, you will not be considered part of the Minyan. 2. Is it not the same level of holiness as the men's section. 3. Perhaps a woman will want to Daven there (Piskei Teshuvot 55:26).

XL Before Davening

Q: I wake up very tired and sometimes fall back asleep before Davening. Coffee gives me a stomachache. Is it permissible for me to drink XL before Davening to wake me up?

A: Yes. There is no difference between XL and coffee. It contains a lot of caffeine. It is preferable to drink the type without sugar. By the way, it is an unhealthy drink..

Smoking Drugs

Q: I am a teacher. Should I tell my students that before I became a Baal Teshuvah, I smoked drugs and now - Baruch Hashem - I am far from that place?

A: No, lest they say: We can smoke drugs now and then do Teshuvah.

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Hilchos Purim

8184. "It is best for one to increase (his expenditures) in giving gifts to the poor (Matanos L'Evyonim), than increasing one's seudah and gifts to friends (Mishloach Manos), as there is no greater and more glorified simcha (happiness) than gladdening the hearts of the poor, of orphans, of widows, and of converts; because one who gladdens the hearts of the these downtrodden are akin to The Shechina (Hashem) as it says about Hashem "To give life to those who are low etc'."

Shulchan Aruch 694:1 MB3, Rambam Hilchos Megillah 2:17, Mes. Sofrim 21:4

8185. Both men and women, (as well as children over the age of Bar and Bas Mitzvah) are obligated in the Mitzvah of Matanos L'Evyonim. Although this is a positive Mitzvah (bound by time - i.e. required to be done on the day of Purim) which normally women would be excluded from; nevertheless, because women were also saved from Haman in the nes (miracle) of Purim, Chazal obligated them in this mitzvah. Shulchan Aruch w/Mishnah Brurah 695:4 MB25, 694:1 MB1, Piskei Tshuvos 695:15

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subject: Shul Building II

Shul Building

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Shul Building II

Question #1: One shul

"May we merge two existent *shullen*, when each has its own *minhagim*?"

Question #2: Two shuls

"Is it permitted to leave a *shul* to start our own?"

Question #3: More seats?

"Can there ever be a problem with adding more seats to a *shul*?"

Introduction:

Our *batei kenesiyos* and *batei midrashos*, the buildings that we designate for prayer and for study, are referred to as our *mikdash me'at*, our holy buildings reminiscent of the sanctity of the *Mishkan* and the *Beis Hamikdash*.

As I mentioned in last week's article, there is a *halachic* requirement to build a *shul*. To quote the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Tefillah* 11:1-2), *Any place that has*

ten Jews must have available a building that they can enter to pray at every time of prayer."

Changing neighborhoods

An interesting *teshuvah* from Rav Moshe relates to a *shul* building that had been originally planned with a lower level to use as a social hall, with the *shul* intended to be on the upper floor. They began to use the social hall for *davening* until they built the *shul* on top, but the neighborhood began to change. Before they even finished the social hall, it became clear that they would have no need to complete the structure of the building. They never finished the building, and instead, directed the efforts and finances toward purchasing a new *shul* in a neighborhood to which people were moving. The old *shul*, or, more accurately, the "social hall" part of the old *shul* building, is at the stage where there is barely a *minyan* left, and the dwindling numbers imply that it is not going to be very long until there is no functioning *minyan*. The question is that they would like to sell the old building and use the money to complete the purchase of the new building. Furthermore, the *mikveh* in the town is now in a neighborhood to which women are hesitant to travel, so they want to use the funds from the old *shul* building to defray the construction costs of a necessary new *mikveh*.

Because of the specific circumstances involved, including that it is unlikely that people from the outside will drop in to *daven* in this *minyan* anymore, Rav Moshe rules that they are permitted to sell the building.

A similar responsum from Rav Moshe was when they needed to create a *shul* in a neighborhood where there was a good chance that the Jewish community there would not last long. Rather than declare their building a *shul*, they called it a library and used it as their *shul*. Rav Moshe suggests that they might have been required to do so, since they knew from the outset that the days of the Jewish community were numbered (*Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim, 2:44*).

More seats?

At this point, let us discuss the third of our opening questions:

"Can there ever be a problem with adding more seats to a *shul*?"

There is an early responsum on the topic (*Shu"t Harivosh #253*), and the ruling might seem to us counterintuitive. A wealthy individual purchased several seats in the *shul* many years before. Probably, when the *shul* was built, the community had sold or perhaps even auctioned seats, at prices depending on their location (think of the relative ticket prices on theater seats, *lehavdil*). The seats are considered private property and are even at times rented out to others.

There is now a shortage of seats in the *shul* and the community would like to add new seats in empty areas of the *shul*. The wealthy fellow claims that this will make it more difficult for him to get to his seat, and that his own seat will be more crowded as a result. Can the community add seats, notwithstanding his claim?

The *Rivosh* rules that the community cannot add new seats, because the wealthy fellow already owns the right to get to his seat in a comfortable way. However, the *Rivosh* rules that the community may do the following to try to increase the availability of seats:

1. They may set a limit on the rental price of the existing seats.
2. They may pass a regulation that unused seats must be rented out.

Building two shuls

There is an old Jewish joke about the Jew stranded on a desert island who built two *shuls*, one to *daven* in, and the other never to walk into. Is there any *halachic* basis to this habit we have of opening several competing *shullen* in the same neighborhood?

Indeed, there are old responsa regarding this question. The *Radbaz*, one of the greatest *halachic* authorities of the fifteenth century, was asked such a *shaylah* (*Shu"t Haradbaz #910*).

A man named Yehudah Abualfas wanted to open a second *shul* in his town. The background appears to be as follows: The community, which may have been located somewhere in Egypt, was composed predominantly of families

who originated from Tunisia, but there were individuals who had settled there from other places. The *shul* followed the *minhag* of Tunisia.

Yehudah Abualfas, who was born and raised in this community with Tunisian customs, and everyone else living in the town, were members of the general community. They donated to the community's *tzedakah* fund, participated in its fees and taxes, and *davened* in the community *shul* which followed *minhagei* Tunisia.

Abualfas's family originated from a place where they followed the customs of the Spanish communities, not those of Tunisia. (*Ashkenazim* tend to group *Sefardim* and *Edot Hamizrah* together as one group. Technically, *Sefardim* are those whose antecedents once lived in Spain, whereas there were Jewish communities from Morocco to Iran and even farther east whose ancestors never lived in Spain and should be called *Edot Hamizrah*.) Abualfas and his friends had begun to develop their own community, consisting of members who identified as *Sefardim* and not as Tunisians, and they wanted to create their own community following *minhag Sefard*.

Shul versus community

The *Radbaz* divides the question into two topics: May the *Sefardim* establish their own *shul*, and may they establish their own community?

Regarding the establishing of their own community, which would mean that they would no longer participate in the *tzedakah* fund and other taxes and fees of the general community, the *Radbaz* rules that, once they have individually been paying as members of the main community, they cannot separate from that community and create their own. As individuals, they are bound to continue contributing to the main community.

However, regarding whether they may create their own *shul*, the *Radbaz* rules that they may, for the following reason: since they do not want to be forced to *daven* with the rest of the community, their desire to have their own *shul* will disturb their *kavanah* while *davening*. The *Radbaz* discusses at length the issue of *davening* with *kavanah*. He notes that one is not permitted to *daven* when one is angry, and that the *Gemara* states that, if the *amora* Rav Chanina ever got angry, he did not *daven* that day. Furthermore, we see that any distraction is a reason why one should not *daven*, even that of an enticing fragrance. Therefore, one may not *daven* when in the presence of people that one does not like. The *Radbaz* further suggests that just as there is a *halacha* that one will study Torah properly only when he is interested in the topic, a person will be able to concentrate in his *davening* only when he is praying where he is happy. For these reasons, the *Radbaz* rules that people who are not satisfied praying with the rest of the community are permitted to organize their own *shul*. However, he rules that it is within the community's prerogative to ban the forming of other *shullen*, when this will harm community interests.

Berov am hadras melech

The *Radbaz* then discusses the *halachic* preference of *berov am hadras melech*, a large group of people (attending a *mitzvah*) honors the King (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b). This means that it is preferable that a large group of people *daven* in one *shul*, rather than split among several smaller *shullen*. The *Radbaz* concludes that, indeed, it is preferable for everyone to *daven* in the same *shul* but, when people will be unhappy, that factor permits them to open their own *shul*.

The *Radbaz* closes this discussion with the following:

"Do not interpret my words to think that I believe that dividing into different *shullen* is good. G-d forbid... However, we are required to try as hard as possible that everyone pray with a full heart to his Father in Heaven. If it is impossible to pray with a full heart when *davening* in a *shul* that one does not enjoy, and the people will constantly be arguing, having different *shullen* is the lesser of the two evils."

An earlier authority, the *Rivosh* (*Shu"t Harivosh* #253) mentions the same ruling -- individuals who want to establish their own breakaway *minyán* cannot be stopped, and that it is improper to prevent this. However, if the members of the existing *shul* claim that their *shul* requires the income or membership to keep going, one should examine whether the claim is truthful.

If, indeed, it is, one should work out a plan that accommodates the needs of both communities. (See also *Rema*, *Choshen Mishpat* 162:7.)

Two shuls

At this point, we can now address the second of our opening questions: "Is it permitted to leave a *shul* to start our own?"

The short answer is that there are circumstances when this is permitted, although, in an ideal world, it is not preferred.

One shul

At this point, let us examine the first of our opening questions: "May we merge two existent *shullen*, when each has its own *minhagim*?"

The answer is that, because of the rule of *berov am hadras melech*, it is preferable to merge *shuls* into a larger entity, but, as I explained above, this will depend on circumstances (see also *Shu"t Binyan Tziyon* 1:122). If the members understand that it is a greater honor to *Hashem* to have a large *shul* with many people *davening* together, that is preferred.

Conclusion

Understanding how much concern *Chazal* placed in the relatively minor aspects of *davening* should make us more aware of the fact that *davening* is our attempt at building a relationship with *Hashem*. As the *Kuzari* notes, every day should have three high points -- the three times that we *daven*. We should gain our strength and inspiration for the rest of the day from these three prayers.

The power of *tefillah* is very great. Man was created by *Hashem* as the only creation that has free choice. Therefore, our serving *Hashem* and our *davening* is unique in the entire spectrum of creation. Remember that we are actually speaking to *Hashem*, and that we are trying to build a relationship with Him. Through *tefillah*, one can save lives, bring people closer to *Hashem*, and overturn harsh decrees. We are required to believe in this power. One should not think, "Who am I to *daven* to *Hashem*?" Rather, we must reinforce the concept that *Hashem* wants our *tefillos*, and He listens to them!