

SHEKALIM

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Kings II 12

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Sh'kalim, speaks about the collection of funds for the Bais Hamikdash. In the days preceding King Yehoash's reign, the Bais Hamikdash interior was severely neglected and required significant repair. The Kohanim responded and organized a collection towards this purpose. After their unsuccessful attempt to collect the necessary funds, the righteous King Yehoash spearheaded the collection and an overwhelming response resulted.

The reason for this neglect is explained in Divrei Hayomim (2:23) wherein the wicked Queen Atalya and her sons are blamed for the deteriorated condition of the Bais Hamikdash. The royal family had severely mistreated the holiest structure on earth, living freely inside its walls and causing much damage to its interior. In truth, money had been constantly donated by the Jewish people to repair the Bais Hamikdash but the funds were consistently misappropriated by Atalya and used to further her practice of idolatry. Now, that the pious Yehoash was king idolatry was banned from the royal government and the funds were put to their intended usage. Finally, after so many years the Bais Hamikdash was efficiently restored to its magnificent glory.

This successful campaign in the times of Yehoash resembles, in a certain way, the collection we read about in this week's parsha. As we know, the Jews in the desert had misused their wealth and utilized it to produce the Golden Calf. Our Chazal (see Brochos) view the Jewish nation's abundance of wealth as the source of their problem. Wealth produces a sense of power and superiority and creates the illusion that one is in control of his own destiny. In this same manner, the Jewish people responded to their desperate plight and, after perceiving that Moshe Rabbeinu had permanently left them, took control of their own situation. Fortified with wealth and power they created their own leader and protector which was embodied in the Golden Calf. When Moshe Rabbeinu returned they recognized their grave error and immediately shifted their focus to their true protector, Hashem. After seriously regretting their wrongdoing and after Moshe Rabbeinu interceded on their behalf they were granted the opportunity to rectify their sin. Hashem informed them of His interest in establishing a permanent residence amongst His people and invited them to donate funds towards this cause. This time they utilized their money for the proper purpose and erected a most glorious Sanctuary wherein the presence of Hashem resided.

The reading of Parshas Sh'kalim and its haftorah serve as an important introduction to the month of Adar and the holiday of Purim. In Megillas Esther (3:9), we read about the wicked Haman's impressive presentation to the royal treasury of ten thousand silver blocks. Haman attempted to use his wealth to influence the king and gain permission to destroy the entire Jewish nation. He therefore pledged an enormous sum to the treasury to compensate for the financial loss it would suffer through the destruction of the Jewish people. However, the Gemara in Megilla (13b) tells us that Haman's wicked efforts were preempted by the donations of the Jewish people to the Bais Hamikdash. Interestingly, this exact sum of ten thousand silver blocks was annually donated by the Jewish people for sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "Let the Jewish nation's ten thousand abort Haman's influential process of his ten thousand." The lesson of this gemara is that if one is not personally influenced by money then financial influence of others can have no effect upon him. The Jewish people's annual donation established that they were not influenced by money. They properly allocated their funds to the most worthy of causes and annually gave ten thousand silver blocks to Hashem and His Bais Hamikdash. Therefore, Haman's ten thousand blocks, his financial influence, could have no effect on the Jewish people. Eventually, the king would and did see through Haman's plot and his money and influence were of no effect.

It is with this lesson that we welcome the second month of Adar. Parshas Sh'kalim reminds us of the great significance that money can have when allocated in the proper ways. Although wealth produces an inappropriate sense of power and control it can also serve as a positive productive vehicle. The Jewish people in the desert atoned for their grave sin through their generous contributions to the construction of a Sanctuary. And as we learn from the miracle of Purim, allocation of one's wealth for proper purposes can even thwart off the fiendish plans of our enemy. Through our charitable donations, we are assured that even our most powerful enemy will have no financial influence over us.

With the above, we gain special insight into the unique nature of Purim's Mitzvos, the allocation of funds for Machtzis Hashekel, Matanos L'evyonim, and Mishloach Manos. On Purim, we display our special Jewish quality of generosity and invest our money in the best of causes. Instead of using our wealth to motivate kings towards destruction we use it to further tzedaka and friendship. Through these acts we are guaranteed to be protected from the influential power of our enemies and in this special merit of tzedaka we will eventually witness the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash and the return of the Divine Presence to Israel.