

WHEN EVERYTHING FITS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Like all that G-d commanded Moshe, so the Children of Israel did all of the work. And Moshe saw all the labor, and behold, they had done it, in accordance with what G-d had commanded, so they did, and Moshe blessed them." [39:42-43]

The verses clearly seem repetitive.

The Chasam Sofer explains: "labor," or melacha in Hebrew, refers to what they actually did with their hands, while "work," or avoda, refers to the effort, the motivation in their heart, even without action. Avoda can also be translated as "service," which makes this dichotomy easier to understand. In the Shema, we read that we are to "love the L-rd your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." [Deut. 11:13] Our Sages ask [Talmud Ta'anis 2a]: "What is the 'service' that is in the heart? This refers to prayer."

The verse says, "Like all that G-d commanded Moshe, so the Children of Israel did all of the work." They did it as HaShem wanted it: they "put their hearts into it." They did the work with a full heart.

How did Moshe know this? How did he know what was in their hearts? How could he tell that they gave of themselves with a full heart? The verse tells us: "And Moshe saw all the labor, and behold, they had done it, in accordance with what G-d had commanded..." He saw that the work had been done to perfection, without any omissions or defects. From this, he recognized that they obviously gave of themselves with a pure heart, with purest intent, as HaShem desired.

Had they lacked this purity of heart, they would not have merited such success. They would not have produced such perfection. "In accordance with all that HaShem commanded, so they did." As our Sages say, if the one who leads the prayers is able to say them fluently, it is a good sign for the congregation. It means that they came with good hearts. And for this, Moshe blessed them.

This message from the Chasam Sofer can be understood on a metaphysical level -- that since despite all of our efforts, it is HaShem who grants success, it is perfectly logical that He would give perfection only to those who came with perfect hearts.

But I think, even so, that we can look upon this as a very pragmatic and practical lesson. If a person's entire agenda is to produce something perfect for G-d, then he or she will be concentrating entirely upon the product. But if, on the other hand, a person also has an individual agenda, for self-glorification, fame or reward, then this can lead down the path of destruction. All of a sudden, I'm not

looking for perfection -- I'm looking to be better than everyone else. Perfection is where everything fits together. But in order to be superior, bigger, greater, then my product cannot be identical to someone else's, and cannot mesh with his.

The result cannot be perfect. The result will fall apart.

There are tremendous projects to be done, tremendous opportunities to help others. But if we go about them thinking about our own honor and glory, we risk seeing our efforts fall apart. If our entire focus, on the other hand, is to do good -- then, we can even reach perfection!