

MESSIAH, CAN I KEEP MY ROLLS?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

This week in the parsha, we read about the korbanos (sacrifices) that were brought by the heads of each of the tribes after the completion of the Tabernacle. The Torah describes each sacrifice in full detail - precisely what was brought and in what quantity. This leads to a great deal of repetition, because each sacrifice was exactly the same as the others. Why did the Torah take up so much space? Could we not have merely read the contents of the sacrifices once, followed by the order of the tribes?

Rabbi Shmuel Greinemann of Bnei Braq tells us how it came to be that every tribal head brought the same offering. The decision, he said, was set on the second day, when Nesanel ben Tzuar of the tribe of Yissachar came forward. He obviously knew what sacrifice had been presented the previous day by Nachshon ben Aminadav of Yehudah, and he chose to appear with exactly the same. His intent was to avoid jealousy, which could have arisen had each one brought a different offering -- each could have attempted to "outdo" the others. This effort to avoid jealousy, and demonstrate honor and friendship between these tribal heads, was exceptional. Rabbi Greinemann explains that G-d was so pleased that He permitted the seventh sacrifice to take place on the Sabbath (even though individuals' sacrifices were normally prohibited), and also recorded the sacrifices - in full - for all generations.

Thus we learn how important it is to avoid doing things that will inspire jealousy. If this is so concerning a spiritual matter like sacrifices, how much more true is it when concerning material goods?

We live in a generation busy "keeping up with the Joneses." Everyone wants to make a mint -- and show it off. The wealthy hold Bar Mitzvah parties in football stadiums. It's fine to paste "We're Ready for Moshiach!" [the Messiah] on the back of a Rolls-Royce, but what if the Messiah says you have to go up to Israel without your car?

Someone recently said to me, "you're a .org, right? That's why you're still here!" The ".com boom" was fueled by the amount of venture capital a company could acquire, and the size of the operation it could build. Everyone had to be big -- no, HUGE. As we know, the ability to make a profit serving customers was often a lost art. Many of the survivors today are companies which did not play that game, which did not leap for the glory of being the biggest, the grandest, the deepest in red ink.

Judaism doesn't call for being an ascetic, but it does ask for a reasonable restraint of our material

pursuits (material goods are one thing, materialism quite another). And not only is there an inherent problem of running after wealth; there is also the issue of inspiring jealousy from friends and neighbors. The tribal heads in our parsha gave quite generously to the Tabernacle upon its dedication, and yet carefully demonstrated mutual love and respect instead of trying to "go one better." Could we find more worthwhile models?