

MONEY: WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This is the accounting of the Mishkan . . . (Shemos 38:21)

In a normal Jewish leap year we would have read the Haftarah for this week's parshah about the dedication of the Temple in Shlomo HaMelech's time, connected to the parshah in an obvious way. And, even though Motzei Shabbos is Rosh Chodesh, which usually would have meant that we read the Haftarah from I Shmuel 20:18-42, since it mentions Erev Rosh Chodesh, we don't read that Haftarah either. This is because Shabbos itself is Parashas Shekalim, the first of the four special Maftirs that we read either before or after Purim, so instead we read the Haftarah for this special parshah found in II Melachim 12:1-17.

First a summary of the parshah. We begin with an accounting of all of the materials donated and used in the construction of the Mishkan. As the Talmud states, even Moshe Rabbeinu was not above suspicion, though obviously that had more to do with the people who suspected him than Moshe himself. Accountability is necessary even, or especially, when doing the work of God.

After that, Moshe Rabbeinu inspected the quality of the work to make sure everything was according to specification. After all, it was God they had to please not just any flesh-and-blood leader. The Shechinah was meant to dwell in the Mishkan but only if it was spiritually perfect, which it was, and therefore Moshe Rabbeinu approved. There is very little room for fudging, if any at all, when it comes to building a house for God, including within us.

Finally, the parshah concludes with the highlight, not just of the parshah, not just of the entire Torah, but of history itself. By the end of the parshah God's glory fills the Mishkan, vindicating the Jewish nation in the ultimate way possible from the episode of the golden calf. Happy is the person upon whom the Divine Presence dwells.

That was the parshah. As for the special Maftir for Parashas Shekalim, we read the section from Parashas Ki Sisa about the mitzvah of the Half-Shekel piece that every Jew was supposed to give to the Temple once a year. It was given in advance of the month of Adar for the sake of purchasing community sacrifices as part of the Temple service.

Thus, though it is not actually connected to this week's parshah, it is a fitting end to it. Pekuday itself is an accounting of how the donations given in Ki Sisa were used for the construction of the Mishkan, a good lead-in to the special Haftarah for Parashas Shekalim.

The Haftarah is about Yehoash HaMelech, who became king of the Kingdom of Yehudah at the age of seven years and ruled for 40 years before being struck down by rebellious servants. However, what we read only covers how he was a righteous king who saw to the upkeep of the Temple, which had fallen into disrepair. He made sure that the monies donated to the Temple were used to pay the craftsman hired to make the repairs.

So, everything has to do with money for either the Mishkan or the Temple, and the appropriation of the funds. This might seem to have little to do with Purim coming up, except for the fact that the giving of the Half-Shekel was considered to be the "cure in advance of the illness." As the Talmud explains, Haman bought the right from Achashveros to destroy the Jewish people, and he might have been successful had the Jewish people not already given their Half-Shekel in Moshe Rabbeinu's time.

Money is a major theme of Purim. It is one of the few holidays that specifically has a mitzvah of giving tzedakah, Metanos L'Evyonim. After all, Purim is about getting back to the real you, about stripping away the layers of facade and persona that may have been built up over the years covering up the essence of you are. As mentioned in the past, we drink wine to neutralize our bodies so that we can act more like the souls we are in essence, at least on Purim.

As the Talmud states, there are three ways that a person reveals his true nature: his cup, his money, and his temper. Being drunk is not an excuse to lose oneself and what one says and does when he has had something to lift his spirit says a lot about what is actually going on inside of him.

You don't have to be rich to have a charitable nature, and you don't have to give a lot to be considered generous. The quality of one's giving is not determined by how much he gives but by how much he wants to give. There are people who can only afford to give small amounts but it is clear by the way they give it that, if they could, they would give very generously.

Likewise, how quickly one gets angry in a situation and how angrily he responds to it is also a tell-tale sign of more than just his temperament. It is, more importantly, a sign of how a person reads situations, and specifically, the Divine Providence of a situation. Even a person with a propensity to become angry does not when he realizes that what is happening to him is a function of the will of God.

In this case something is definitely lost in the translation. The Hebrew words for each of the three are identical except for their middle letters. In other words, each word begins with a Chof and ends with a Samech, but the middle letter of each is different, being Yud-Vav-Ayin, whose gematria is $10+6+70$, or 86. This just happens to be the gematria of Elokim (with the Heh), the Name of God that refers to His hidden hand.

The point? Whether we're talking about a person and his money, how he deals with strong drink or difficult situations, there is a common denominator to all of them: Elokim. When a person finds himself in a situation that is financially taxing, inebriating, or emotionally stressful, is he blinded to the

hand of God or made more acutely aware of it? Does he become more spiritually sensitive or less so?

How can one tell?

There is a great story in Tanach that most people are aware of though they probably do not look at it in this way. It is such an important lesson about life, which is probably why so many people overlook it. The Satan lost the battle in this one and he sure is not going to let others build on his failure to achieve spiritual success.

The story is about Iyov, or Job, the righteous man who went from riches to rags overnight. He had everything and everything going for him until God wagered a bet that Iyov would stand strong in his faith even should he lose it all. After that, the Satan preceded to bring calamity after calamity to Iyov until he lost everything he held dear, including his wife and family.

What made it even more difficult for Iyov, and everyone else who knew him, was that he had been fully righteous. If anyone had been deserving of God's blessing it had been Iyov, and yet God seemed to treat him like he was the worst of the worse, inflicting personal tragedy upon personal tragedy.

Iyov's response:

And he said, "From my mother's womb I emerged naked, and I will return there naked. God gave and God took; may the Name of God be blessed." (Iyov 1:21)

Iyov's brave statement was more than simply an affirmation of his faith in his Father-in-Heaven, and His just approach to life. It was a reminder to everyone, probably including himself, of our relationship to our blessings in life, as if to say, no matter how hard we work to accomplish what we do in life, we are entitled to nothing. Everything in life is a gift from God, a loan that can be recalled at any time for reasons we may or may not understand. There is no such thing as entitlement.

From Iyov, that may have been obvious. But from looking at the rest of the world throughout the rest of history, it is much less so. History is filled with terrible conflict and bloody wars that have resulted, all in the name of entitlement. The basis of all of it has usually been someone's belief that he had something coming to him, and he became angry at another who denied it to him.

That was certainly Kayin's belief, though God did try and straighten him out:

God said to Kayin, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen? Is it not so that if you improve, it will be forgiven you? If you do not improve, however, at the entrance, sin is lying, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it." (Bereishis 4:6-7)

The message? Hevel could not take anything from Kayin that was meant for him because nothing is ever really "meant" for anyone of us. Rather, we can "earn" something by showing God that we are worthy of the blessing He wants to give to us. Even then other factors may play a role in whether or

not we get the object of our desires, though we may not be aware of them.

The Maharal points out in Nesivas HaTorah that Torah, like water, only flows to the lowest point, which in this case means to the humblest of people. He explains that if a person assumes his own greatness then God will bring him down in some way. After that he can rebuild himself with humility and becoming worthy of Torah greatness.

This is really true in all aspects of life, not just with respect to Torah. Our money may seem to be ours. We may feel justified in saying what we do while in a state of inebriation. We might think that we are perfectly in our right to get angry when things do not go as we planned. But that is only when one comes from a sense of entitlement, and with such an attitude one does not build Mishkans, one destroys them. We are given what we have to better serve God, not our own self-interests.

Chazak!

Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org