

MONEY LAUNDERING: MAKING SURE DONATIONS TO THE MISHKAN ARE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Money Laundering: Making Sure Donations To The Mishkan Are "Clean"

The first pasuk [verse] in Parshas Vayakhel [Shmos 35:1] refers to an assembly of the Children of Israel. The first Rashi in the parsha informs us that the assembly took place on the day after Yom Kippur, when Moshe descended for the final time from Har [Mt.] Sinai. Although Parshas Teruma and Tezaveh, which deal with the construction of the Mishkan, precede Parshas Ki Sisa, which deals with the sin of the Eigel Eigel Hazahav [Golden Calf], Rashi follows the opinion that the sin of the Eigel occurred prior to the building of the Mishkan, and that the building of the Mishkan in fact atones for that sin.

The sin of the Eigel occurred on the 17th of Tamuz. On that day, Moshe descended from Har Sinai for the first time and broke the Luchos [Tablets]. Moshe went up for a second 40-day period to plead with the Almighty that He not destroy the Jewish people because of this sin. The Almighty granted forgiveness and Moshe went up for a third 40-day period -- beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul -- in which he received the second set of Luchos. The third descent was on Yom Kippur. On the morrow of that day the announcement went forth to build the Mishkan.

It is interesting to note another incident that occurred on that same day. In Parshas Yisro [Shmos 18:13] the pasuk says "And it was on the next day" in reference to the incident where Yisro saw Moshe Rabbeinu sitting in judgment over the people "from morning until evening." Rashi quotes the Sifrei that this event also happened "on the morrow of Yom Kippur."

It appears that according to Rashi, both the "sitting in judgment the whole day" and the announcement to collect money for the building of the Mishkan happened on the very same day. The Shemen haTov points out that this is not coincidental. The two events dovetail with each other.

If Moshe wanted to ask people to donate funds to the Mishkan, the first thing he had to determine was that the money in fact belonged to them. It was only after Moshe was able to validate that everyone's money was free of any suspicion of theft or extortion that he was able to ask for donations to build the Mishkan.

This is reminiscent of the famous Maharsha in Tractate Kesubos, who decries the custom of people who donate to charity only for the honor they gain, when the money is not legitimately theirs. The Maharsha bemoans the fact that people acquire money through deceit and through theft from non-Jews, thereby desecrating the Name of G-d. They give large sums of such ill-gotten money to charitable causes and expect honor and prestige from the recipients of these funds. The Maharsha proclaims such action to be in the category of "mitzvah ha'ba b'aveirah" [a good deed coming about through sin] and warns that such money will not last.

Before a person contemplates how much money he has available to give or where he should give it, he must first contemplate if the money is legitimately his.

Medrash Links Pasuk In Pekudei With Teaching of Darkei Shalom

There is a difficult Medrash Tanchuma in Parshas Pekudei. The Torah states that the Mishkan and all of its keylim [vessels] were brought to Moshe [Shmos 39:33]. The Medrash seemingly makes a very strange comment that many things were enacted for reasons of preservation of peace (darkei Shalom) and that in this case, Moshe enacted the proscribed sequence for calling up people to read from the Torah -- Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael.

We can easily understand the concept of preventing fights by having an orderly sequence for calling up Jews for Aliyahs. However, what is the connection Moshe's enactment and the pasuk teaching that the Jews brought the Mishkan and its vessels to Moshe?

Maharal Diskin gives a beautiful interpretation. He asks why the people brought the various components of the Mishkan to Moshe. Why didn't Moshe go to the people to collect these components? The Maharal Diskin explains that Moshe hesitated to go to the people to collect because of the dilemma - Whom would he go to first? To avoid this problem he instituted the rule: "You come to me." This was an example of Darkei Shalom [a peace-inducing method]. That is why the Medrash on this pasuk cites the wide spread practice of Chazal to implement procedures which embody Darkei Shalom, such as the order of Kohen - Levi - Yisrael in the Torah readings.

The Shemen haTov cites a practice amongst a number of prominent Chassidic Rebbes that if one of their Chassidim wants them to be Mesader Kiddushin (officiate at their marriage) the rule is "You come to me" rather than vice versa. The Choson-Kallah must come to the Rebbe's house or the Rebbe's courtyard and he will officiate there. The Rebbe does not accept invitations to perform weddings away from his "home-base".

The Shemen haTov explains that this rule is designed to avoid machlokes [arguments; insult]. If the Rebbe had to decide which wedding invitation to accept and which to reject, which he could attend and which were too far away, then there would be fights and resentment among the Chassidim. This is the same theory as "they brought the Mishkan to Moshe" (rather than having

Moshe go around collecting the pieces from each and every donor).

Great is peace. We must always look creatively for ways to enhance peace amongst Klal Yisrael.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei are provided below:

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