

"PLEASE CONTRIBUTE" PRECEDED BY THE COMMAND TO OBSERVE SHABBOS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayakhel

"Please Contribute" Preceded By The Command To Observe Shabbos

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 672, The Mishebeirach in Halacha. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Vayakhel marks the fruition of the instructions provided in Parshas Terumah and Tezaveh. On a theoretical level, the earlier parshios spell out the structure of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], its various utensils, and the uniform of those who use those utensils and serve in the Mishkan. In this week's Parsha, it is finally time to "pay up". This is the intent of the section introduced with the words:

Moshe said to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, saying: "This is the word that Hashem commanded, saying: 'Take from yourselves a portion for Hashem, everyone who is generous of heart shall bring it, as the gift for Hashem: gold and silver and copper...' [Shemos 35:4-10]

Our parsha should logically begin with these words, asking for donations to the Mishkan building fund. However, our parsha begins (after an introductory pasuk [verse] stating that Moshe gathered the people to tell them the things Hashem commanded) with a two sentence section which is almost entirely off topic from the subject matter at hand:

Six days work shall be done but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall light no fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day. [Shemos 35:2-3]

The Shabbos laws were already mentioned in greater detail in last week's parsha [31:12-17]. The repetition this week, at the beginning of Vayakhel, seems totally redundant. Why is it necessary to begin the section dealing with donating money to the Mishkan with this brief preamble telling us about Shabbos?

Many commentaries deal with this question. Rav Naiman notes in his sefer Darkei Mussar a peculiarity in the expression "sheshes yamim tay-a-seh melacha" which literally means "six days

WORK SHALL BE DONE". A more common expression (as we indeed find elsewhere in the Torah) is "shashes yamim ta-a-seh melachtecha" (six days YOU SHALL DO YOUR WORK). It is peculiar to use the passive form of the verb for doing work. The Darkei Mussar suggests that by use of this expression, the Torah is teaching us a fundamental rule for anyone who is engaged in earning a livelihood: The amount of money a person makes is NOT commensurate with the amount of effort he puts into his job.

A person is indeed required to make an effort to earn a living and support a family. One who does not make that effort and expects "mann" from heaven will be disappointed! However it is flawed to mentally make the equation that "the more work I do the more money I will make." It does not work like that.

The Almighty decides what each of us should earn. We can exhaust ourselves in our professions and either we will not succeed in earning as much as we feel we should earn or we perhaps will earn all that money and then lose it due to unforeseen expenses or poor investments, or a variety of other "unforeseen" circumstances. On the other hand, we can exert the normal amount of effort and the Almighty may bless the actions of our hands and we may earn large sums of money, far greater than what others who work much harder than we do earn.

This is a fundamental belief in our religion and it really is what Sabbath observance is all about. Common wisdom is that "Of course if one works seven days a week, he will make more money than if he works six days a week." And yet, the Torah commands us to work only six days. If the Almighty wants to bestow upon us a certain degree of financial success, he will bestow it to us whether we expend six days of effort to earn it or we expend seven days of effort to earn it.

On a macro scale, this is what the mitzvah of Shmitah (in Parshas Behar) is all about. It may not be such a big deal to take off one day a week, but it is a big deal to take off one year in every seven. What will happen to the farmer if he does not labor in the field during that seventh year? The fundamental reason behind the mitzvah to observe the Sabbatical year of the agricultural cycle is to recognize that one's livelihood (parnassah) comes from the Almighty. He gives us His Promise that He will take care of us!

This is why the Torah here states "For six days work SHALL BE DONE". The work must be done, but one should not think "you shall do work". The "you" is not what gets the job done, it is the "He" that gets the job done and allows "you" to earn a living.

This is the necessary preamble to asking the people to donate funds for the construction of the Mishkan and its associated vessels. Whenever people are approached for giving charity - whether for institutions or for individuals - it is hard for them to write the check. It is always challenging because "where is the money going to come from?"

It was in order to address this perennial question that Moshe prefaced the chapter asking the Children of Israel to contribute to the Mishkan building fund with the mitzvah to observe Shabbos

and specifically with the expression: Six days work SHALL BE DONE. This expression teaches that money is earned based on what G-d wills. After establishing the principle that in six days a person can earn the same amount that he would earn in seven days (because everything he earns comes from the Almighty), Moshe can proceed to ask for donations of gold, silver, copper, and so on.

It was first necessary to remove the people's anxiety and assure them that in the final analysis their donations would not cost them anything. As the Rambam writes in Mishneh Torah, "no one becomes poor from giving charity." Only then did Moshe ask for contributions to the Mishkan.

Yes, We've Heard of Chur, But Who Was Uri?

Chapter 35 pasuk 30 contains a repetition of something taught previously: "See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri, son of Chur of the tribe of Yehudah." Bezalel was the general contractor of the entire project relating to the construction of the Mishkan. He oversaw all of the artistic creation and the rigorous compliance with the specifications spelled out in the portions of Terumah and Tezaveh.

The Torah emphasizes Bezalel's genealogy by tracing it back three generations. Rashi quotes the Medrash explaining the reason for including Chur, Bezalel's grandfather, in this lineage. The Medrash explains that Chur became a martyr while protesting the desire of the Jewish people to build a Golden Calf when Moshe was apparently delayed in descending from Mt. Sinai after forty days absence. The Medrash says that the Almighty swore to Chur that he would be paid back for his devotion and promises that his descendants would be prominent leaders of the community.

It is true that Bezalel made a name for himself. Bezalel the great artisan is well known. But what about Uri? No one seems to have heard anything about Chur's son, Uri, who was Bezalel's father. What happened to G-d's promise that Chur's descendants would be special people regarding Chur's own son, Uri?

The answer is that the Almighty has a very long memory. In human terms, we expect instant gratification and we expect a Divine Promise to be fulfilled immediately. This is not necessarily how the Almighty works. The promise might not be fulfilled in a single generation. It might take two generations. It might take four generations. With the Master of the Universe's broad perspective of time, promises may be fulfilled only many years later.

To an extent, this phenomenon explains a common problem. Sometimes we see a wonderful person - an outstanding Torah personality - who comes from very unexceptional parents. We may ask ourselves, "Where did such a person come from?" There are famous families where Torah greatness seems to be almost automatically passed on from generation to generation. But there are other individuals where greatness seems to have sprung out of nowhere. "Where did he come from?" we may ask ourselves.

Our problem is that we see only one generation. We look at the person's parents and are surprised by the son's greatness. However, it is quite possible that the greatness stems not so much from the parents but from a grandparent or even a great grandparent or great great grandparent that perhaps the child may have never even known! The self-sacrifice and dedication for this great Jew of antiquity may have earned him an illustrious descendant whose time to make an appearance has only now arrived.

The lesson of Bezalel ben Uri ben Chur is that greatness itself may be a "recessive gene". Chur was a great individual, who gave his life in self-sacrifice for the Almighty. That greatness was passed down through his son Uri, but clearly manifested itself only two generations later in his grandson, Bezalel.

This idea may be an important source of inspiration to educators in Day Schools where the student population does not come from the most observant and Jewishly committed sets of parents. One may be tempted to ask, what can I expect from such students? Look who their parents are! However, one needs to look beyond the parents. All these students have or had grandparents and great grandparents, some of whom or even many of whom were very righteous and learned individuals. Perhaps, for whatever reasons, the Almighty did not reward them with children who completely followed in their footsteps. Perhaps, over the years, their children and grandchildren have deviated a great deal from the path and lifestyles of their ancestors. But maybe, just maybe, the Heavenly Payback time has come for the reward due for the dedication and self-sacrifice of those previous pious generations. Maybe given the proper education and the proper attention, these young students will grow up to embody the values and commitment of their ancestors. Maybe, just maybe, their success and achievements will be the reward that the One who is beyond time has in Mind for those pious Jews of yesteryear.

Maybe Uri was not so special, but the grandfather named Chur explains the success and achievements of the young man named Bezalel. Do not ever write off a kid because of the way he looks or the way his father looks.

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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