

THE ALMIGHTY LIKES HUMBLE BUILDINGS AND HUMBLE PEOPLE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Pekudei

The Almighty Likes Humble Buildings and Humble People

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #849 Saying L'shem Yichud - A Good Idea? Good Shabbos!

Towards the beginning of Parshas Pekudei, the Torah says that the entire weight of all the gold that was dedicated to the Mishkan was 29 Kikar and 730 Shekel [Shemos 38:24]. The Sforno writes that this was a small quantity of gold, relatively speaking. The amount was a small fraction of the gold present in the first Bais HaMikdash built by Shlomo HaMelech, which in turn had a fraction of the gold present in the remodeled second Beis HaMikdash built by Herod. Nevertheless, points out the Sforno, the Presence of the Shechinah in the three Sanctuaries (the Mishkan and the two Batei Mikdash) was inversely proportional to the amount of gold present. The Shechina was most acutely felt in the Mishkan of Moshe, less so in the Mikdash of Shlomo, and far less so in Herod's Bais HaMikdash.

The clear lesson, says the Sforno, is that the grandeur of the wealth or the size of the building is not what determines the Presence of G-d amongst the Jewish people. The beauty of a building has nothing to do with whether the Presence of the Shechinah will reside in that building. The Master of the Universe is not impressed with posh and lavish surroundings. The Mishkan, which was temporary -- almost a tent like structure, was a poor man's house and yet the Shechinah was always there. The Almighty does not value such things. What G-d wants is people's feelings and devotion. He is not interested in the surroundings.

My purpose in mentioning all this is not to cast aspersions against any congregation with posh design and theater seating. I happen to enjoy comfortable seats. My point is that we should all remember that none of this is what is going to bring down the Shechinah into our synagogues.

According to the Sforno writes, the actions and the piety of the people present will bring down the Shechina.

An extension of this is another idea of Chazal: Take heed of the children of poor people (aniyiim), for from them will emerge Torah. In this context, 'aniyiim' does not merely refer to people who are poor of means. Sometimes we see children who come from backgrounds that are less than stellar and they turn out to be the best students in the Yeshiva. Some of them go on to be great men in Israel.

This is the same thought. They come from humble backgrounds and they are humble people. From them, Torah comes forth. Rav Meir Shapiro once explained that when children from poor families see the sacrifices of their parents to send them to Yeshiva and to afford tuition and the like, it makes a profound impression on the children. When children are aware of all that sacrifice, they approach their learning differently. The common denominator between the thought regarding the gold in the Mishkan and the students from poor backgrounds is that the Almighty appreciates humble backgrounds.

The Soloveitchik dynasty of Torah greatness is well known in the Yeshiva world. It has transcended many generations and continues to this very day. How did this great Torah dynasty get started? I have seen this story written up in many places, most recently in something I read by Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, zt"l, a member of this Torah dynasty.

The dynasty did not started with a great Talmud Chochom, but with a man who was a great business man, named Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, who lived in the time of Rav Chaim of Volozhin. He was in the lumber business and was a fantastically wealthy individual. He gave vast sums of money to charity on an annual basis. All of a sudden, his business took a turn for the worse and he lost everything.

It was such a shocking setback for the Jewish community that Rav Chaim of Volozhin convened an emergency meeting of the Beis Din in Volozhin to determine what Rav Moshe Soloveitchik did that caused Divine disfavor, such that his business suffered such a dramatic reversal. The Beis Din met and deliberated and the only thing they could come up with was that Rav Moshe Soloveitchik gave away too much money to charity! They ruled that he was in violation of the Talmudic dictum that one is not allowed to give away more than 20% of his income to Tzedakah.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin was not satisfied with the conclusion of this Beis Din. At any rate, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik was out of a job, he was out of his business, and he was bereft of his wealth. What could he do? He started learning. He was obviously a very smart man. He no longer had a business, so he went to the Beis Medrash and he learned with the same diligence and the same acumen that made him into this fantastically wealthy person. He became a tremendous Talmid Chochom in his own right. He was the progenitor of the Soloveitchik Torah dynasty.

After that, Rav Chaim Volozhin said "Now I know why he lost his money. Because of his great merit in giving charity, the Almighty wanted to allow him to have the merit of being the patriarch of a great dynasty of Torah scholarship. But (based on the above quoted teaching of Chazal), it is the children

of poor people who have the greatest potential for having Torah issue forth from them. Moshe Soloveitchik had a problem. He was too wealthy to have children who would be great in Torah. He lost his money. He became poor. The rest, as they say, is history."

This in fact is the lesson of the Mishkan -- the Divine Presence has an affinity for the humble.

'Sitra Achra' Makes Major Effort Fighting Start Of Something Positive

The completed Mishkan was brought to Moshe [Shemos 39:33]. Rashi comments that the people were unable to erect the Mishkan. It was too heavy for them to lift. Since Moshe had not directly participated in the construction of the Mishkan, Hashem allowed him this privilege of being the one to erect it. Moshe, however, asked the Almighty "How is it possible for any person to single-handedly lift up such a massive structure? If all these people together could not put up the Mishkan, how can I do it by myself?" Rashi quotes the Medrash Tancuhma that Hashem answered Moshe: "You make it look like you are lifting the Mishkan, and I will miraculously ensure that it gets lifted by itself."

The Bikkurei Avraham asks a basic question: We know that the entire Mishkan was intended to be used as a portable structure. For 39 plus years, they assembled and disassembled and reassembled the Mishkan whenever they traveled from place to place. Nowhere do we ever find that they had trouble putting up the Mishkan. We certainly do not find that each time they came to a new place Moshe Rabbeinu had to do this "trick" of pretending that he was assembling the Mishkan. Why was it that the first time was different? Why was it that only the first time, no one was able to erect the Mishkan - not even Moshe - to the extent that it needed to be assembled miraculously?

The Zohar writes that on the day the Mishkan was first erected, the 'sitra achra' was defeated. The 'sitra achra' is the Kabbalistic term for the forces of evil in the world. These forces became vanquished and departed from the world. Once the Mishkan was erected, it was erected 'on high' and 'down below'.

"Samael (evil angel) and the 40 chariots that accompany him were also shaken." I don't know what this means and most people don't know what this means. But the point of this Zohar is that when the Mishkan was finally put up, it had this unbelievable effect on the negative and impure forces in the world, the 'sitra achra'.

This explains why it was initially so difficult to put up. There are certain events in human history that are watershed events. The initial assembly was a watershed spiritual event for the Jewish people and for mankind in general. The assembly of the Mishkan triggered the Avodah in the Mishkan and the Divinely commanded sacrificial order and all the holiness and purity that would emanate from

this Service.

The Sitra Achra is a wise force. It knows how to pick its battles. Why fight one thousand battles when one can choose a single major battle and win it? That battle was the initial assembly of the Mishkan. Since the Mishkan was going to introduce such holiness and such Divine Service into the world, this was the event into which the Sitra Achra decided to put all his powers and wage his battle. That is why it was initially so hard to assemble, but once it was accomplished it became easier.

The lesson is that whenever one tries to introduce something spiritually worthwhile that is going to have a positive effect on people, it is going to be an extremely hard to get it off the ground. That is why building a shul or mikva or Yeshiva or school or some new organization that is going to help people and add holiness to the world is so challenging. Know that all such attempts will trigger a royal battle. The 'sitra achra' is going to pull out all stops for this very same reason. "If I can stop this, look how many battles I will win down the line!" If a mikva (or anything else of that nature) is going to be built, look how much holiness will be brought into this world. "If I can stop a Yeshiva from being created and there is less Torah in the world, there are hundreds of battles I have won - hundreds of people that will not go to a Yeshiva down the line. If I lose this "startup battle" -- the 'sitra achra' fears -- look at all the Torah learning and Kedusha that will come into existence."

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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