

PARSHAS PEKUDEI

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Sfas Emes, Zechuso Tagein Aleinu, Parshas Pekudei 5632/5635

The parsha begins: "Eileh pekudei ha'mishkan, mishkan ha'eidus ..." (ArtScroll: "These are the reckonings (i.e., the accounts) of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of Testimony ...")

The Sfas Emes starts his ma'amar by quoting the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba on the parsha. That paragraph, in turn, refers us to a pasuk in Mishlei (28:20): "Ish emunos rav berachos ..." (ArtScroll: "A man of integrity will increase blessings ..."). Finally, to complete this introduction, we note the comment of the Medrash on that pasuk: "Ish emunos, zeh Moshe." ("Who is the 'man of integrity' of whom the pasuk speaks? Moshe.")

This Medrash is truly enigmatic. We are therefore grateful to the Sfas Emes for explaining it to us. The Sfas Emes tells us that this Medrash is trying to deal with a basic problem. Chazal (Ta'anis, 5a) have taught us that counting things can harm them. Similarly, things that are kept out of sight -- by not being counted -- are more likely to flourish. In light of these principles, why did the Mishkan have to undergo an accounting process?

Before going further, we address another question. On what basis does the Medrash see "ish emunos" as an allusion to Moshe Rabbeinu? I suggest two answers. As you may remember, HaShem refers to Moshe as "be'chol bei'si ne'eman hu" (Bemidbar, 12:7). (ArtScroll: "In My entire house, he is the trusted one."). And "ne'EMaN" quickly evokes "EmuNos".

Another possible answer also comes to mind. The pasuk's word 'emunos' readily suggests the shorash (root) MNH -- to count (as in the word 'minyan'). The Torah (Shemos, 38:21) tells us that in fact, Moshe Rabbeinu was personally involved in the accounting. Bringng it all together, we can understand why Chazal saw Moshe Rabbeinu as the 'ish emunos'.

This discussion helps us answer a key question that the Sfas Emes raised earlier. We know that counting generally harms the objects being counted. Why, then, did the mishkan have to undergo an accounting process? As is so often the case, the Sfas Emes finds an answer in the Zohar. Citing that sacred text, he explains that the enumeration recounted in our parsha had a special feature. As noted above, Moshe Rabeinu himself was doing the counting. For this reason, the accounting came not with a negative effect, but, to the contrary, with a blessing. As the pasuk tells us, "Ish emunos," -- i. e., when Moshe Rabbeinu is doing the counting -- "rav berachos" -- he brings with him an abundance of blessings.

How does this work? To answer, the Sfas Emes begins by explaining why counting objects can be harmful. He notes that counting involves giving each item in the set a number of its own. But having a number of its own separates the item being counted from the others in the set. In this situation of "pirud," each is on its own, without mutual support. By contrast, a batch of uncounted objects constitutes a "klal," with each member of the klal drawing strength from being part of a larger group.

Likewise, when Moshe Rabbeinu was counting the objects, his involvement brought them closer to their shresh (their source). And proximity to HaShem brings with it a happier state -- i.e., berachos.

We can readily understand how this pirud / klal pattern works with people. Why HaShem established the same pattern for inanimate objects is not clear. One possibility is that the reason is pedagogic. That is, to drive home the point about pirud and klal, HaShem built the same pattern into the world of inanimate objects

We move now to the second paragraph of the Sfas Emes of the year 5635. The parsha's first sentence contains the words "pekudei ha'mishkan". As we saw earlier, the pshat (simple, plain meaning) of these words is "the reckonings of the Tabernacle." But the Sfas Emes shares with us a deeper understanding of these words. "Ahl pi remez" -- by allusion -- we can read the word "pekudei" as having the sense of commands or orders, as in Tehilim (19:9): "Pekudei HaShem yesharim..." (ArtScroll: "The orders of HaShem are upright ...")

The Sfas Emes understands "commands" in this context to refer to mitzvos. But how does this sense of "pekudei" fit in with the pasuk's next word, "ha'mishkan" -- the Tabernacle? The Sfas Emes answers that the word "mishkan" comes from the same root as does the word Shechina (the Presence of HaShem). Thus, continuing this line of thought, we see that "pekudei hamishkan" comes to mean that by doing mitzvos, we bring HaShem into our midst.

Transition from the pshat meaning of "pekudei ha'mishkan" -- the Tabernacle's accounts -- to its meaning via allusion -- mitzvos bring HaShem to us -- is clearly a bold intellectual khap (coup). But being bold is not enough for a dvar Torah. It must also be true. As his name indicates, the Sfas Emes is a person who insists on truth. Thus, he asks, how does our performing mitzvos bring the Presence of the Shechina to our midst?

He answers with a close reading of the Torah's text. The pasuk says: pekudei hamishkan, mishkan ha'eidus" ("... the Tabernacle of Testimony"). The Sfas Emes explains that by performing mitzvos, we bear witness that we accept HaShem's Kingship. Every mitzva we do is testimony that we subordinate our will to that of HaShem ("Avinu, Malkeinu"). And in our so doing, HaShem's Presence in the world becomes more apparent to the naked eye.

Note further the Sfas Emes's conceptualization -- that by doing mitzvos, we can deepen our relationship with HaShem. This conceptualization can help us avoid a standard pitfall of observant Jews - doing mitzvos, but without much of a relationship to HaShem.

For one more thought of the Sfas Emes on this parsha, we go to the third paragraph of his ma'amar in the year 5635.

The Sfas Emes quotes the pasuk (Shemos, 39:32): " ... vaya'asu Bnei Yisroel kechol ahsher tziva HaShem" (ArtScroll: "All the work of the Tabernacle was completed ... the children of Israel had done everything that HaShem had commanded")

The Sfas Emes tells us that much more is going on here than a superficial reading would suggest. He explains that construction of the Mishkan was the "tikun" (the repair, redemption) of "asiya" (building, doing). Physical activity (i.e., "asiya ") can be used for Avodas HaShem or (chas ve'shaslom) for bad purposes. When we used our asiya to make the golden calf, asiya acquired negative associations. But apparently HaShem wanted to redeem asiya from disrepute. How did He do it? By giving Bnei Yisroel the option of building the mishkan. Constructing the mishkan involved the complete range of asiya activities. Hence, by building the mishkan, Bnai Yisroel redeemed all asiya.

This is why the activities used to construct the mishkan are the same melachos that are forbidden on Shabbos. For these activities are the prototypes of the actions with which HaShem created the world. By commanding Bnei Yisroel to use the very same activities to create the mishkan, HaShem made it clear to Bnei Yisroel that asiya in this world can be a noble activity, indeed, "ahsher tziva HaShem."

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