

Parshas Pekudei

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1. How Do We Surpass our Limitations?

The Torah states regarding the building of the Mishkan, **“Every man whose heart inspired him came...”** The Ramban explains in his commentary that when the Torah states “Every man whose heart inspired him” is referring to the artisans and the craftsmen. The reference to those of “generous heart” relates to those who donated the necessary building materials for the Mishkan. The artisans and craftsmen who were “inspired” were able to perform the most creative and intricate workmanship despite the fact they were not mentored or trained by master craftsmen. These people initially engaged in the most primitive labor of brick and mortar in Egypt. Their incredible abilities came naturally because they were “inspired” by their heart. How did this happen?

Ramban explains that these individuals, who previously had no training whatsoever, approached Moshe and said to him, “What can we do? Whatever level of participation G-d wants, we are available.” Ramban says that their hearts were uplifted in the ways of G-d. It was because of this selfless dedication and desire to do whatever they could to bring about G-d’s Will, they were gifted by Hashem with unusual ability to build the Mishkan. Hashem endowed them with a level of understanding and creativity that was one of a kind. We can learn from this that even if a person is limited, if he is inspired to do the Will of Hashem, he will merit Divine Assistance that will allow him to surpass his limitations.

There is a Positive Commandment that every Jew must Love Hashem (as it is stated in the Shema). Rambam writes in *Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah (The Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah)*, “What does one do if he does not “love” G-d?” Love is something that one “feels” and is not something that one “does.” Regarding the commandments of the Torah, even if one is not motivated to do the mitzvah or does not appreciate the wrong vis-à-vis the infraction, one can force himself to be proactive or to remain in a passive state. However, regarding love, which is a feeling and an emotion, how does one develop that? Rambam answers that if one looks at existence and sees G-d’s unlimited wisdom within creation, it will cause him to be overwhelmed and awed to the point of negation, thus generating a desire to have a relationship with G-d (which brings about a feeling of love). Love is all encompassing and consuming. Without it, one cannot be inspired. When one realizes and internalizes who Hashem is and thus sees his own limitations, he will become inspired and desire to cleave to Hashem. When one has that level of inspiration, he will be taken beyond his limitations.

The Jews were previously involved with brick and mortar in Egypt and had no relevance to fashioning gold or doing the other intricate, creative activities that were needed for the Mishkan. It was only because of their level of inspiration that they were endowed with this new ability.

Many are concerned with the catastrophic rate of assimilation. They point out the thousands of Jews assimilating for every one who returns to Judaism. It appears to be a hopeless situation. The question we must ask ourselves is – how deeply concerned are we about assimilation? If one is truly pained by a problem he does not leave a stone unturned until he finds resolution. If one is able to develop within himself that feeling of urgency and selfless giving, he will be endowed with an ability to deal with the issues that were untenable.

Every day we pray in the *Kaddish* that the great Name of Hashem should be advanced, exalted, and sanctified throughout existence. On a daily basis, we see heresy and denial of G-d’s existence on the rise. Does this mean to say that our *tefillos* (prayers) are falling on “deaf ears” G-d forbid? What can we do to stem the tide and make G-d’s existence known and revered in the world?

If we would truly be inspired and selflessly dedicated to bringing about the sanctification and glorification of Hashem's Name, it would happen because through inspiration one is able to surpass limits and break down barriers that would have otherwise been impregnable.

2. Utilizing One's Ability to its Utmost

The craftsmen and artisans of the Mishkan were those who were "inspired" by their heart. Ramban explains that it was because of their selfless dedication to do the Will of G-d, that He gave them the ability to perform all the necessary tasks for the building of the Mishkan.

The Torah states, "**In the heart of those who have wisdom, He (Hashem) gave wisdom (chochmah).**" The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that Hashem added wisdom only to the heart that had already contained it. If a vessel has relevance to blessing, then blessing can be added to it.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was merely an infant of three months, his mother placed him in a box among the reeds in the Nile (to save him from the Egyptian decree that all Jewish male children should be thrown into the Nile). The Torah tells us that the daughter of Pharaoh at that time was bathing in the Nile. When the Egyptian Princess noticed the box floating in the water, she sent "*amasah* (her maidservant)" to retrieve the box. Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate *Sotah*, which interprets the word "*amasah*" not to mean "maidservant," but rather as "her hand" (since the arm is the length of a cubit which is an *amah*). This means that *Bas Pharaoh* (daughter of Pharaoh) extended her hand to retrieve the box. The Torah is telling us that the hand, which is normally the length of a cubit, extended itself to become many cubits- so that she was able to retrieve the box. Seemingly, this was an unusual miracle. What precipitated it?

The Maharal of Prague in his work *Givuras Hashem* explains that the human hand was created with the capacity to retrieve and extend itself. Since the hand has this inherent function, when a person has an overwhelming desire to utilize it, he is able to activate a mechanism which allows the function to go beyond its limits. If a person has a strong desire to retrieve something, Hashem would extend the hand to do so only because the hand already has that capacity.

Another example of this can be found in the Gemara in Tractate *Megillah*. The Gemara tells us that in order for someone to be admitted into the throne room of Achashverosh (the Persian emperor), it had to be with the extension of the king's scepter. If the king did not do this to indicate that the person was welcome, the person would be put to death. When Esther was told by Mordechai to go to Achashverosh, she was concerned that since she was going without the invitation of the king, he might not extend his scepter to admit her. This would seal her fate. Mordechai told her that if she wants to have this opportunity to save the Jewish people, she must take advantage of the moment. When Esther entered the throne room of Achashverosh (her husband), he extended his scepter to indicate that she was welcome.

The Gemara tells us that a miracle transpired. The scepter extended itself to such a degree that Esther was able to touch it although she was at a distance. According to one opinion in the Gemara, it extended itself as much as fifty cubits (approximately 70 feet). Based on the Maharal's principle regarding the hand of the daughter of Pharaoh, we are able to understand what precipitated the miracle of the scepter. The extension of the scepter indicated that Achashverosh desired his wife and thus extended the scepter for her to approach him. There is an argument in the Gemara as to how far it was extended; the length reflected the degree to which he desired her.

If a person has innate wisdom, he is endowed by G-d with a greater degree of wisdom. As it is stated, "**In the heart of those who have wisdom, He (Hashem) gave wisdom (chochmah).**" The person who has wisdom in his heart and is inspired by it to utilize his ability to the point that he is consumed by that desire, Hashem will enable him to go beyond his limitations.

Every Jew has the potential of becoming a *tzaddik* (devoutly righteous person). A *tzaddik* is one

who meticulously observes the mitzvos and does the Will of G-d. This is clearly indicated by the fact that a Jew is held to a standard that he is culpable if he fails in the observance of the mitzvos. If there is culpability then it must be that every Jew has the ability to observe all the commandments meticulously or there would be no basis for culpability. We must ask ourselves - how much do we desire to succeed in the area of spirituality? Do we truly want to become the *tzaddik*? If a person desires to become the *tzaddik*, he will receive the assistance to achieve his wishes. G-d will extend his abilities beyond their limitations in order to attain this goal.

3. *The Essence of the Jew*

At the beginning of the Portion of Pekudei, the Torah refers to the Mishkan as, “*Mishkan Ha’aydus* (Tabernacle of Testimony).” Rashi cites Chazal that the reason for this reference is that the Mishkan was a testimony for the Jewish people that Hashem had forgiven them for the Sin of the Golden Calf. Since Hashem allowed His Divine Presence (*Shechina*) to dwell in their midst, it was an indication that they had been reinstated. However, the Midrash explains “*Mishkan Ha’aydus* (Tabernacle of Testimony)” differently.

The Midrash states, “Rebbe Yishmael says that the *Mishkan Ha’aydus* was a testament to the nations of the world that (G-d’s) forgiveness exists only for the Jewish people. It is a testament that Hashem was receptive to the penitence of the Jewish people.” How do we understand the Midrash’s statement, “(G-d’s) forgiveness exists only for the Jewish people”?

At the Covenant Between the Parts, after Hashem had promised Avraham, our Patriarch, that the Jewish people would inherit the Land of Canaan, Avraham asked G-d, “How will I know that my children will inherit it?” Avraham understood that man is inclined to sin and thus the Jews would inevitably become unworthy to retain the Land. In addition, he understood that if one sinned, the consequence of his failing would be terminal because his spirituality would be diminished and could no longer be rehabilitated. Thus, if his children were to sin, ultimately the Land would be taken from them. To this Hashem responded, “take for yourself a calf, a sheep, etc...” which alludes to the various species that the Jewish people brought as communal offerings. This indicated to Avraham that there is a concept of spiritual rehabilitation through sacrifices, which is relevant to the Jewish people. Penitence, in conjunction with the communal offering, can bring about atonement and full reinstatement.

The Maharal of Prague explains that when a Jew sins it is only “circumstantial.” The sin does not emanate from the essence of the Jew, which is the quality of his soul. Since this is the case, the consequence of sin can be corrected. The Gemara in Tractate *Kiddushin* tells us that when a Jew is committed to performing a good deed, although it may not come to fruition (because of unforeseen circumstances), he is fully credited with the good intention, as if it were performed. However when one is committed to doing evil, for the Jew there is no culpability until the act is perpetuated. However, this is not the case regarding a non - Jew. The Torah refers to Lavan (the father-in-law of Yaakov our Patriarch) as “Arami who destroyed my father (Yaakov).” The Gemara asks, “Why is Lavan referred to as the Aramean who destroyed Yaakov when he only *contemplated* destroying him?” The Gemara answers, “Hashem regards the contemplation of sin by a non-Jew as if he actually committed the sin.” What is the difference between the Jew and the non-Jew in this regard?

The essence of the Jew is pure. When a Jew sins it is only because of circumstance, as the Maharal explains. However, a non-Jew does not possess this purity. This is why Hashem values the positive contemplation of the Jew as if the good deed came to fruition and does not hold him accountable for his evil contemplation. A *korban* (offering) is therefore meaningful to correct the failing, which is only superficial. This is why the offering of atonement only has relevance to the Jew, whose sin is circumstantial (superficial). It does not emanate from his essence.

With this explanation, we can understand the Midrash, which states that the *Mishkan Ha’aydus* was a testament to the nations of the world that G-d’s forgiveness exists only for the Jewish people. It is not that the non- Jew does not have a share in the world to come. If the non-Jew fails

in his spirituality, there is no context through which he can be rehabilitated. However, since Hashem allowed his Divine Presence to dwell in the midst of the Jewish people, it reflected the dimension of the Jew's spirituality and that his sin is superficial and circumstantial.

4. Adar- The Month of Redemption

Regarding a leap year in which there are two months of Adar, the Gemara in Tractate *Megillah* rules that Purim is celebrated during the second Adar. The initial consideration in the Gemara of celebrating Purim during the first Adar is based on the principle that if one should come upon a mitzvah, he is not permitted to pass over it in order to perform another. Thus, since Purim can be celebrated during the first month of Adar it should not be delayed until the second one. However, the ruling is that we celebrate Purim during the second Adar. The basis for this is that we want to "juxtapose redemption to redemption."

The month of Nissan (which follows Adar) is the time of redemption because it was during this month that the Jews were redeemed from Egypt. Purim is the time when the decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child was rescinded and our enemies, the Amalekites, were destroyed. Therefore, Purim is celebrated during the second Adar, which is juxtaposed to the month of redemption, which is Nissan.

The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* states, "When the month of Av enters one decreases his joy. When the month of Adar enters one increases his joy." The month of Av is the time when the first and second Temples were destroyed among many other tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. Therefore, it is a month in which the Gemara states that one should limit his business activities, refrain from undertaking refurbishment of one's home, as well as other activities that would bring about joy. While the Gemara enumerates what one should do in order to decrease joy in the month of Av, it does not suggest what one should do to increase it in the month of Adar. However, the Gemara does say that if a Jew has a court case with a non-Jew, he should bring it to trial in the month of Adar because the mazal of the Jew is strongest during this month. Conversely, during the month of Av one should not go to trial with a non-Jew because the mazal of the Jew is weak during this month. How does one increase his joy with the entry of the month of Adar?

The Gemara in Tractate *Megillah* tells us that Haman chose the month of Adar to institute his decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child because he believed that this month represented a bad omen for the Jewish people since Moshe, their teacher, passed away during that month. The Gemara tells us that what Haman overlooked was that Moshe was also born in the month of Adar, which indicates that it is the most positive month. In fact, he passed away on the same day of his birth. Therefore, the mazal of Adar is the strongest for the Jew.

There is an argument in the Gemara in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah* as to when the world was created. Rebbe Eliezer is of the opinion that it was in the month of Tishrei and Rebbe Yehoshua is of the opinion that it was created in the month of Nissan. They also argue regarding the month in which the Patriarchs were born. Rebbe Eliezer is of the opinion that it was Tishrei while Rebbe Yehoshua believes that they were born in Nissan. What is the correlation between the birth of the Patriarchs and the creation of the world?

In order to support his opinion, Rebbe Yehoshua cites a verse in *Malachim (Kings)* which refers to the month of Nissan as "the month of beauty." This indicates that the Patriarchs, who were the radiance and beauty of the world, were born during that month. Just as Nissan is the month when existence came into being, identically the world assumed special significance when the Patriarchs were born – which is the month of Nissan.

It was not coincidental that Moshe was born in the month of Adar. We see a correlation between the special mazal for the Jew in the month of Adar and the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe, who is the link and the conduit between G-d and the Jewish people, was born during this month only because it was most special vis-à-vis the Jewish people. Thus, the decree of Haman would

ultimately be annulled.

The Jew is not bound to a mazal (the zodiac), as it is stated in Tractate *Shabbos*, “*Ein maza l’Yisroel* -- the Jewish people have no mazal (are not bound to the zodiac).” This is because maza can be altered through tefillah (prayer). Nevertheless, every Jew has a mazal. Hashem metes out reward and punishment through the system known as the zodiac (mazal). The month of Adar is a time when reward and G-d’s kindness is more readily available to the Jew. However, the month of Av, which connotes tragedy and suffering vis-à-vis the Jewish people, there is a greater susceptibility to punishment. One may say that if a person is deserving of a guilty verdict it should not make a difference which month he goes to trial. However, the Gemara tells us differently. The optimum month is Adar and the least favorable one is Av. Winning or losing a court case has to do with merit, which will determine the verdict.

Since the mazal of the Jew is at its zenith during the month of Adar, one has the opportunity to draw upon this wellspring of blessing. If one prays sincerely in this month for spiritual and material well-being, his prayers will be more readily answered during this month. Therefore, we should all beseech Hashem especially during this month to bring about the ultimate redemption the coming of Moshiach.

5. The Importance of Reassurance

The Torah refers to the Tabernacle as “*Mishkan Ha’aydus* (Tabernacle of Testimony).” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason for this reference is that the Mishkan was a testament to the Jewish people that Hashem had forgiven them for the Sin of the Golden Calf. The proof of Hashem’s forgiveness was that He allowed His Presence (*Shechina*) to dwell in their midst. If this is the case then why is it necessary to refer to the Mishkan as the Tabernacle of Testimony, if G-d’s Presence was sufficient evidence that they had been forgiven?

We find that throughout the years of wandering in the desert, the Jewish people failed a number of times due to a lack of trust in G-d. The most serious of their failings was the Sin of the Spies. G-d had promised them that they would receive a land that “flows with milk and honey” – the Land of Canaan. When the Jewish people approached the Land of Canaan, they asked Moshe to send spies to scout out the Land in order to conquer it. After forty days of surveying the Land, the spies returned with their report, which was ominous and bleak. They had said that it was a land that devours its inhabitants, a land of giants, and therefore it cannot be conquered or inhabited. The Jewish people believed that Hashem had brought them to this point only to destroy them because they were not fully forgiven for the Sin of the Golden Calf. If the presence of the *Shechina* in their midst was sufficient proof that G-d had forgiven them, then why would they think otherwise?

Sforno explains that the Jewish people believed that Hashem had not forgiven them for their idolatrous ways in Egypt. They were suspect that Hashem’s interaction with them was a mere ploy to eventually destroy them. Thus, their own sense of unworthiness was the basis for their lack of trust of Hashem. They could not understand how it was possible to be engaged in activities which are seen by G-d as abominable (idolatry), and despite that be embraced by Him. Therefore Hashem identified the Mishkan as “*Mishkan Ha’aydus*” so that the Jewish people would know that they were forgiven. If in fact G-d continuously proved to the Jewish people through the daily miracles (the manna, wellspring, and Clouds of Glory) in addition to those that had already transpired, then why were they not thoroughly convinced that they were worthy?

The Midrash that is cited by Rashi states that the Mishkan is referred to as “*Mishkan Ha’aydus*” so that the Jewish people should know that “Hashem overlooked (*veteir*)” the Sin of the Golden Calf. The Midrash does not say that Hashem fully forgave them for their sin. It was because of this that the Jewish people were not convinced that they were forgiven. The Gemara tells us based on a verse in the Torah that every punishment that will befall the Jewish people until the end of time will contain in it part of the punishment for the Golden Calf. There still exists a connector between the spiritual condition of the Jewish people and the Golden Calf. If we had been fully reinstated and spiritually rehabilitated, we would not have needed the Mishkan to accommodate

Hashem's Presence. The Divine Presence would have dwelled in our midst without the need of an external structure.

Hashem refers to the Mishkan as the "*Mishkan Ha'aydus*" so that we can know and understand that our actions and mitzvos have meaning. Without this testimony, we may have believed differently. The Jewish people are Hashem's "kingly, priestly, and holy nation." Our actions have eternal value and do affect all existence.

Every day we say in the *Aleinu* that Hashem did not make us like the nations of the world and we thank Him for this. We differentiate ourselves by stating that we pray to the King of the Universe while they pray to emptiness and to futility. If a Jew truly believed and internalized this declaration, he would understand the true significance of his mitzvos and would approach them with the greatest degree of reverence and zeal. We should therefore appreciate the opportunity at hand and make a greater effort to fulfill the mitzvos in a more dedicated manner.