

23.
BEKUDE 1981

In this Torah portion Bekude we learn about all the donations which were given to the Temple. They were all accounted for. When people deal with public money especially charity every penny should be accounted for. This Shabbos is also Parshas Shekoleem. We did something very unusual today. We took out three Sefer Torahs, the first because it was a normal Sabbath, the second because it was also Rosh Chodesh, and the third because it was Parshas Shekoleem. Every year a Jew is asked to give half a shekel to support the sacrifices which were brought on behalf of the community twice a day. No Jew could give more. No Jew could give less. Every Jew was equal in the service to G-d. When contributions were solicited for the Tabernacle there were three types of offerings that were allowed. Everyone was asked to give a half a shekel for the Adoneem, the foundations of the Tabernacle, and everyone was asked to give a half a shekel for the sacrifices offered and then everyone could give whatever they wanted to help beautify the Tabernacle. This is the way it should be. Everyone is equal in the Synagogue. Everyone has an equal share in the basis of the Synagogue and in the service. Those who have more should give more to help beautify and maintain a Synagogue on its highest level. However, because a person gives thousands of dollars doesn't mean a person should have more say than anyone else. Everyone is entitled to one vote. In this Torah portion Bekude we learn how it says 18 times that the parts of the Tabernacle were all made as G-d has commanded Moshe. 18, of course, in Hebrew stands for life. That a Synagogue should survive and live must be a base for all its members. In fact, this is emphasized later on in the sentence which says Moses blessed the people for their work. We have 32 letters which is equivalent to the word for heart. A Synagogue must have a heart. In the very end it says that only Moshe Rabbeinu could put the Synagogue together. Moshe finished the work. All the artisans could only see their own particular job. They were each looking for competitive advantage. Only Moshe saw the whole picture. Only he was able to complete

the Tabernacle. Too many times different groups only see their own problems. They don't look at the total picture but all parts of the Synagogue must work together if the Synagogue is to be successful. It's like a rocket which has many engines. If all the fuel just goes to one or two of the engines and the others don't function right even if two function beautifully the rocket will veer and turn on its side or will shudder itself to death. All engines must be equally working. The same applies to the Synagogue. All the needs of the Synagogue must be taken into account. Unfortunately, too many times people are only looking at one aspect. They are not willing to look at the whole picture. I remember once working for a business which stressed very much delivery. Everything had to be on time. They wanted to impress the people with their delivery services. This was very well and good but in so doing they had a lot of breakage and the company lost money. I am reminded of the story of a woman who called up the owner of a furniture store at 3:00 a.m. to tell him how much she appreciated the furniture he had sent her, how beautiful the color, how wonderful the fabric, how his suggestions had been just right. He said, "Thank you, madam, for your compliments, but why are you calling me at 3:00 a.m.?" "Oh, I'm calling you now because they are just now delivering the furniture". Sometimes in our zeal for competitive advantage we can destroy. In America today this is known as special interest. Special interest can be so successful that they can end up destroying instead of building. We in the Synagogue must always remember to make our institution a living institution not just a museum. We also have to make sure it has a heart and if things do not hurt anyone we should accommodate each other. If we do so then surely we will be worthy of the blessing Moshe gave when the Tabernacle was completed.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Torah portion Pekude concludes the second book of the Bible which is known in Hebrew as Shmos, names, or Sefer Hageula, the Book of Redemption. The question can be asked, why is this called the Book of Redemption since only the very first chapters deal with the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. The last chapters deal with the building of the Tabernacle. In fact, the last few verses of the Book of Shmos deal with the cloud covering the Tabernacle and the glory of G-d filling it. We also learn that the Jewish people did not travel until the cloud lifted up from the Tabernacle "to the eyes of all the House of Israel in all their journeys". The use of the words "House of Israel" in the Torah is rare. The Jewish people are usually referred to as the Children of Israel. The reason why this book is called Sefer Hageula, the Book of Redemption, is because it speaks not only of the Exodus from Egypt, but also how we are going to be able to maintain our freedom. We all strive for power, for self-development, but many times this power will squelch others' freedom and our own as well. We must always realize that the glory of G-d should fill all our works, that we have to learn how to limit our power. The Torah speaks about three crowns; the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of power. A cloud must be on all of our strivings. We must always show some restraint. Unless we do we will lose our freedom. That's why the term "House of Israel" is used. We must do the things which are good for our families and the whole community of Israel as well as for ourselves. The story about the man who went to the racetrack on the 11th day of the 11th month at 11:00 a.m. on the 11th birthday of his son. He noticed that on the 11th race there were 11 horses. He bet on the 11th horse. Sure enough, it came in 11th. We will never maintain our freedom just depending upon power or deductions. We must have a balanced society in which everybody plays their part.

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In the Torah portion Pekude we learn how the Jewish people contributed to the construction of the Mishkan. There were three separate donations. One was the half a shekel which everyone gave for the daily sacrifices which were given twice a day in the community's name. Nobody could give more or less. We also learn about the second half shekel which was given for the foundations of the Temple. The silver sockets in which the pillars which held up the Tabernacle were inserted. Here, too, no one could give more than half a shekel or less. There was a third offering which was a free will offering, and everybody could give whatever he could give. This is the way synagogues have always been run. Everyone has a voice in it and no one should have a bigger voice in it just because they have money. As long as a person pays the basic fee of half a shekel, or in our day, the half or one percent of income, then they have an equal voice. People who have more should give more, but this does not entitle them to have their opinion prevail all the time. Everyone is allowed a say. We learn here, too, how the two main architects of the Mishkan and craftsmen were B'Tzalel of the Tribe of Judah, and Oholeav, son of Achisomoch from the Tribe of Dan. B'Tzalel came from a very important tribe who were known for their religiosity. Oholeav came from the Tribe of Dan, which the Rabbis say even practiced idol worship, yet they both had a share in the Temple. No Jew is to be excluded from the synagogue. We also learn how, when all the articles and parts of the Mishkan were finished, they were brought to Moshe because only he could see the whole picture. Everyone else was interested only in their special interest, and, of course, if everyone only was interested in their own special interest to the detriment of the whole, the whole institution would collapse. Families or institutions and even countries must always be run by seeing the whole picture. It is like a rocket. If a rocket has three engines and only one or two of them are working, or if one is working much stronger than the others, the rocket will turn on its nose and disintegrate. Moshe was able to see everything in proportion and, therefore, was able to put the Tabernacle, the House of G-d, together in the proper way. In marriage, too, things must always be held in perspective. When a young couple are building their own house they must put things

in the proper perspective otherwise it will fall down upon them. They must realize that neither of them is doing the other a favor when they get married. They marry because they need each other. When the Tabernacle was finished it says that the cloud of glory filled it and it says that Moshe was not able to come into the tent because the cloud rested on it. Why should this be so? We learn in other places that when the cloud filled the Mishkan Moshe went in and talked to G-d. What's more, what is the symbolism of the fact that G-d's presence was symbolized by a cloud in the daytime and by a pillar of fire at night? In life, many times, even when it is good there are clouds. We must prepare when times are good for when times will not be good. A part of the marriage relationship is to have the courage even when the times are good, to help prepare for the times which may be bad, but even when times are good there are little clouds. They must be seen and they must be dealt with in the right way if progress is to be made and the marriage is to endure. That's why it says that the House of Israel traveled according to the cloud. It uses the expression "house" here which is unusual. Usually it uses the expression "children" or "sons of", but the Jewish people can only make progress when they have families, when they have households. The symbol of fire at night is to teach us that one of the responsibilities of marriage for each of the partners in it is to give hope and courage to each other when times are bad, to be there when you are needed, to give enthusiasm and light and warmth to each other. The Tabernacle symbolized the marriage between G-d and Israel, and it was a priority item to the Jewish people. So, too, for a marriage to be successful a couple must put their marriage as the very first of their priorities. If it is second or third behind a career or sports or hobbies, it will not survive, but if it is a priority item for the couple and if they help each other with the clouds of life and give each other warmth and enthusiasm and support during the dark periods, then it will endure and be a great blessing for them, as the Tabernacle was for the Jewish people. I am reminded of the story they tell about the man who, in order to prove his love for his wife, decided to climb the highest mountain, swim the widest

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river, cross the hottest desert. Of course, the marriage ended in divorce because he was never home. Give each other time. Sometimes if the clouds are too heavy, as was the case when the Mishkan was dedicated, give each other a little breathing room, but always be there when you are needed. Moshe could not go in the first day, but the other days he was always there.

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CAN WE EVER BE SATISFIED?
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the major problems today is that people are never satisfied. So often people who seem to have everything come to see me terribly despondent. Nothing satisfies them. The more they have the more they want. They do not have any feelings at all of positive inner satisfaction. They seem to be continually disappointed. They feel that if only they could get one more object or make a lot more money, then they would finally be satisfied.

The truth of the matter is that these people are never going to be satisfied. They are looking for satisfaction in things. They are always going to be unhappy and terribly restless. Curiously enough, satisfaction is related to holiness. Each of us has within ourselves the power to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. We have the power to make things satisfying. Things by themselves are not going to satisfy us. We achieve satisfaction by the way we use things.

This point is emphasized in the Torah portion, Pekudei, in which we learn how the Jewish people completed the work of the Tabernacle, and how G-d's presence then rested upon them. The second Book of the Bible, Exodus, is known in Hebrew by two names; by the name "Shemos", which means "names", and also by the name "Sefer HaGeula", "the Book of Redemption". This second Book of the Torah deals with the redemption of the Jewish people from

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Egypt, and also with the building of the Tabernacle, or Mishkan. Most of the second Book is taken up with the details of the building of the Mishkan, and only the first half deals with the exodus from Egypt. It is hard to understand why the whole Book is known as Sefer Hageula when most of it has to do with the building of the Mishkan. Also interspersed throughout the details of the building of the Mishkan are the laws of Shabbos. Why, also, did the glory of G-d not descend on the Jewish people until after they had built the Mishkan? Why didn't the glory of G-d descend upon them after the exodus from Egypt? After all, wasn't the exodus from Egypt a greater event than completing the Mishkan? Why did the completion of the Mishkan cause G-d's glory to descend upon the people?

It seems to me that we are being told here something very important about satisfaction and about how we should view what we can do in life. When the Jewish people finished all the parts of the Mishkan, the Torah says "Vayechal Moshe Es Hamlocha" "and Moshe finished the work". The word "Vayechal" is not the normal word for "finish" in Hebrew. The normal word is "Vayikmor".

This word "Vayechal" is the same word that G-d used when He finished the work of creation. It says "Vayechal Elokim Bayom Hashveeiee Melakto" "and G-d finished His work on the seventh day". This means that He finished His part of the world, but He did not complete it.

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G-d purposely left the world unfinished and He asked us to complete it. Moshe, too, finished his part ~~of~~ by putting together the Mishkan, but the Mishkan was not completed. There were many, many more things to be done, proper services had to be conducted in it, etc.

In this world we are commanded to begin the work of completing the world and to finish as much of it as we can even though we know that we will never be able to complete this task. This world will only be completed in Messianic days. It is our job to help bring these days about by finishing as much of the work as we can, even though we all know that we are not going to complete it. If we finish our part then we should be satisfied. I believe that this is one of the correct explanations for the famous phrase from the Pirkei Avos which says: "Eizehu Oshir", "Who is rich?" "Hasameach B'Chelko," "One who is happy with his portion." Satisfaction comes from finishing your portion of creation, from trying your best to do the tasks that you can to help G-d complete the world. If you have done all you can to complete your part of G-d's plan for the ultimate completion, or redemption, of this world, then you should be happy, you should be satisfied.

This is why the phrase "and they did as G-d commanded Moshe" is mentioned eighteen times in the Torah. Eighteen, of course, signifies Chai, or life. They merited satisfaction

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in life because they were able to fulfill their portion. There are also thirteen Hebrew letters in the phrase, "And they did as G-d commanded Moshe." This is the same number of times that the word "Leiv" or "heart" appears in the Torah. This is to teach us that a satisfied heart comes from doing your part in making this a better world. That, too, of course, is what the concept of holiness is all about in Judaism. We make things holy, not G-d. When we make a Brocha before eating, we transform an essentially selfish act into a holy act. We are not eating now just for ourselves. We are eating to help gain the strength to do our share in bringing about redemption or a better world. That's why this Book of the Torah is called the Book of Redemption, not just because it talks about the exodus from Egypt, but also because it teaches us how we can gain satisfaction in life.

It is interesting to note that Mount Sinai is not a holy mountain in Judaism. Mount Moriah, where the Temple stood, is our holy mountain. On Mount Sinai the Jewish people did nothing. They just listened to G-d. On the Temple mount they displayed self-sacrifice from the days of Abraham, the Akedah took place there. There one Jew was willing to sacrifice for another. The people created the Temple. They took the ordinary and transformed it into the extraordinary. This is also what they did when they constructed the Mishkan earlier in the desert.

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That's also why the laws of Shabbos are interspersed among the rules and regulations for building the Mishkan. Shabbos teaches us that one day of the week we are to sit back and enjoy the fruits of our labor of the previous week. We have a right to sit back and to take satisfaction in the things we have created during the week. We are not to impose our will on nature anymore during this day so that on this day we become man, the appreciator. We are to sit back and enjoy the fruits of our labor. We are to sit back and take satisfaction in what we have done and grow closer to our family and friends.

It is always more difficult to appreciate what we have and to see their potential than to start new things. Many people start many projects and destroy what they have when they try to go see and do everything. Families fall apart, institutions fall apart because it is a lot easier to start them and even finish their physical facilities than to maintain them with a good spirit. The spiritual satisfaction, the level of holiness, that comes from maintaining an ongoing relationship is infinitely more rewarding than the satisfaction from starting a new relationship all the time. The memories of the past intermingle with the present and with the hopes of the future to make an infinitely more satisfying spiritual experience.

Moshe, after the Jewish people finished the work of the Mishkan, blessed them. He blessed them with the

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The Torah portion Pekudai is the last Torah portion in the second book of the Bible, Shmos. In it we learn how Moshe completes the erection of the Mishkan, which was constructed "like all which G-d had commanded him". The people had generously donated of their time and effort and skills and resources in order to build the Mishkan. At the very end of the Torah portion we learn how G-d's presence rested on the Mishkan. It says, "And Moshe was not able to come into the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on him. The glory of G-d filled the Mishkan." Then it continues, and it says, "When the cloud went up from on the Mishkan, the sons of Israel traveled on all their journeys, and if the cloud did not go up they did not journey until the day it did go up, because the cloud of G-d was on the Tabernacle during the day and a fire it was anight to the eyes of all the house of Israel on all their journeys." It seems strange that this Torah portion should conclude in this way. It would be enough to say that the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle. Why did it have to give us these detailed instructions of how the Jewish people rested on their journeys and did not travel until the cloud lifted from on the Mishkan? What did this have to do with the fact that now the Jewish people had a tangible symbol of G-d's presence among them? Why, also, does it have to say that the cloud of G-d was on the Mishkan during day and a pillar of fire at night to "the eyes of all the house of Israel on all their journeys"? Usually the Jewish people are referred to as Bnai Israel, the sons of Israel, not the house of Israel. What's more, the rabbis term this second book of the Bible as not only Sefer Shmos, the Book of Names, but also they call it Sefer HaGula, the Book of Our Redemption. Why should this book be known as the Book of Redemption? It is only the first few chapters that deal with the redemption from Egypt of the Jewish people. The rest of the second book of the Bible concerns itself with the revelation that G-d gave the Jewish people

on Mount Sinai and the building of the Mishkan. Why should it be that the whole book is labeled the Book of Redemption?

It seems to me that if we look carefully at the words that are used to describe the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt perhaps we can understand what we are talking about here. When G-d redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt it says that He was going to redeem them five ways. It says, "And I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt, and I will save you from their worship, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and I will take you to Me as a people, and I will bring you to the land." There are five different aspects of redemption. The first three really deal with the redemption from Egypt. G-d said, "I am going to bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt, the grinding poverty of Egypt which forces you to concentrate all your energies on just survival. It would not allow you to have a spiritual life. It made you into slaves." A person who is a slave, a people especially who are slaves, cannot reach spiritual heights, so G-d is going to redeem us from this terrible oppression. What's more, He is going to save us from their worship, which means He is going to save us from idolatry, from the theoretical system which justified this oppression. The Jews were just not going to change places with their oppressors, now being the oppressor and oppressing others, but we are going to be saved from this whole terrible system of idolatry which postulated that slavery is necessary for human civilization, that G-d was going to redeem us from those foolish ideas. He was going to allow us to be His partner in creation to teach us all that every group and every people has a part to play in perfecting this world. Finally, He said, "I am going to redeem you with an outstretched arm, that you are going to be convinced of My power, that right makes might, not might makes right." This is a very difficult concept to understand because usually in common everyday occurrences we see that

might makes right, not right makes might. How often have the mighty seemed to have trampled over the poor and the helpless and the suffering and got away with it? Of course, we know in the long sweep of human history that this is not so. Hitler was defeated. The tyrants were overthrown, but sometimes in our common ordinary lives it is hard to see this. You work for a corporation and unless you play a power game and all the politics, you sometimes get squashed and will not get ahead, but, of course, in the long run it is those who are upright that eventually triumph. In the short run they may not, and you, as an individual, may still suffer, but, of course, you will still be able to retain your dignity.

The last two terms, "And I will take you to Me as a people," means that I have shown you the way how to act. I have showed you what is right. I have revealed My Torah to you, and, therefore, you know how to do the right thing. Finally, we have the last, "And I am going to bring you to the land." In order to be redeemed, and of course here we are talking not just in national terms but also in personal terms as well, in order to lead a life that has meaning and purpose we have to, so to speak, redeem ourselves. G-d, according to Judaism, has given us all the power we need to lead wonderful, fulfilling lives, that we do not have to be dragged down by feelings of inadequacy, by feelings of terrible guilt, by feelings of overriding inferiority. G-d has said we can rise, we can do things, we can have dignity, but there is a price to be paid, a cost, that you have to pay in order to have this dignified life. What is that? You must be constantly willing to improve. You cannot just say that you feel G-d's presence or you have certain momentary highs in life. The Jewish people had just completed the Tabernacle. They felt G-d's presence. The glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle. The cloud was resting on the Mishkan, but, yet, this cloud was not going to stay there forever. It was going to move. A person, in order to have a life of meaning

