

Torah Weekly

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PARSHAT TERUMAH PARSHAT SHEKALIM

25 Shevat - 1 Adar 5785
23 February - 1 March 2025

Torah: Exodus 25:1 - 27:19
Rosh Chodesh: Numbers 28:9-15
Shekalim: Exodus 30:11-16
Haftorah: Kings II 11:17 - 12:17;
Isaiah 66:1; Isaiah 66:23-24;
Isaiah 66:23

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 191 Preparation for War

We are commanded to appoint a priest who will deliver before the soldiers the "Battle Address." In this address he requests of those not suited for battle - whether due to physical or emotional frailty, or due to the fact that their minds are preoccupied with a matter that prevents them from properly focusing on the battle - to turn away.

CHERUBIM OF GOLD

It's not for naught that we are called "The People of the Book."

At the inauguration of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on 15 Av 5678 (July 24, 1918), Chaim Weizmann, who would become Israel's first president, made the following observation: "It seems at first sight paradoxical that in a land with so sparse a population, in a land where everything still remains to be done, in a land crying out for such simple things as ploughs, roads, and harbors, we should begin by creating a center of spiritual and intellectual development."

This telling act, as profoundly articulated by Mr. Weizmann, is reminiscent of an earlier one by the ancestors of those who established this university.

The Bible relates that even before relocating his family from Canaan to Egypt, Jacob sent Judah to Egypt on a special mission.

The objective of this mission is the subject of dispute. Some say that he was sent to tend to emigrational technicalities and to scout out housing accommodations for Jacob's large family.

The Midrash offers a different take: "Judah descended to Egypt before the rest of the family in order to establish a house of study."

Thus, before they had houses in which to live, they had a house in which to study.

But where does this obsession with education stem from?

In a rare and personal disclosure, G-d says regarding Abraham: "I cherish him." Why? "For he shall instruct his children and household after him to keep the ways of G-d, to do charity and justice."

It wasn't his intellectual prowess or integrity, neither was it his legendary kindness or even his spirit of activism and sacrifice that earned Abraham G-d's unique affection. It was his exemplary focus on education.

Further confirmation that education must be the subject of our individual and collective focus came at Sinai, before our first face-to-face meeting with G-d.

Before G-d agreed to that meeting, at which occasion He planned to gift us the Torah, He asked Moses to present trustworthy guarantors who would ensure the Torah's continued observance.

He didn't trust the adults. Even the elders and scholars were ruled out. But when the children were mentioned, He was satisfied, and the deal was concluded.

The Sages develop and expand Torah law and thought, but it's the children who preserve its practice and tradition.

The Cherubs

Of all the utensils in the Holy Temple, the Holy Ark was the holiest. It housed the Tablets, the bedrock of our faith. Indeed, the Tablets served as the marriage document binding G-d to our people.

But who could be trusted to guard this seminal manuscript that communicates G-d's love and wisdom? In whose hands should lay the treasured "marriage contract"?

"From the lid [of the Ark] you shall make two cherubs at its ends. Their wings shall spread upwards, sheltering the lid with their wings" - Exodus 25:19

"Each of the cherubs had the image of a child's face" - Talmud Sukkah 5b

"One in the likeness of a boy and the other of a girl" - Zohar Vol. II, 277b.

The cherubs weren't made in the image of Moses, but in the image of our children.

G-d chose the Jewish children to watch over the Torah and constitute His national guard. It is their wings that will carry the Torah into the future.

Pure Gold

From the verse, "You shall not make gods of silver with Me..." we learn that "it is forbidden to make the cherubs out of silver." Furthermore, we are told, "If you deviate from My instruction and make them of silver, instead of gold, they are like false gods before Me."

Why the all or nothing approach?

Also, this particular stipulation applies strictly to the cherubs. All the other vessels in the Temple may be made of silver (or other metals) if no gold can be found. Why the distinction?

Symbolically, however, the answer is quite clear: Regarding the rest of the vessels of the Temple, while ideally all G-dly instruments should be made of gold - representing the very best - when in a pinch, silver can suffice.

But when it comes to the education of our children, as represented by the cherubs, there is no room for compromise. Only the purest and best schooling will do.

(This is not to say that schools should charge the price of gold, sadly one of the reasons why attendance at Jewish schools has fallen. Rather, that they offer their students the highest caliber of instruction.)

What is a good Jewish education? Culture, Yiddish, Talmud? When the subject material and the manner in which it is taught is downgraded to even "silver," instead of raising children who grow up walking in the ways of G-d, one

creates, G-d forbid, "false gods!" - children who grow up worshipping themselves.

True Gold

But how is gold defined? What is a good Jewish education? Culture, Yiddish, Talmud?

Here too, the cherubs offer insight. "You shall make two cherubs of gold; beaten shall you make them."

Rashi explains: "Do not separately craft the cherubs and then afterwards attach them to the lid. Rather, take a big block of gold at the outset of the making of the lid, and strike it at its middle with a hammer and mallet so that the shapes of the cherubs are hammered out and protrude upward." What would be wrong if they were made separately and then attached? Does the process itself have to be so difficult?

Perhaps it can be said that the Ark - and its lid - represents the Torah that it houses; while the cherubs represent the children.

When it comes to "building" your child, so to speak - i.e., implanting within him or her a value system, mindset, worldview, etc. - this can be done in one of two ways: Separate from the lid, the Torah, or molded from the lid itself. We must want our children to be one with Torah, fashioned out of Torah. To the point that separating from Torah, G-d forbid, would be like separating from themselves. Their every bend and curve should be indistinguishable from the gold of which they are fashioned.

An example to illustrate:

One day, as I handed some coins to my wife, my just-turned-one-year-old daughter proudly belted out: "Mommy, tzedakah [charity]!"

My wife explained: "We've developed a daily routine, where every morning, together, we place a few coins in the charity box. She has grown to love this practice, and now calls out 'tzedakah!' whenever she catches sight of any coins."

To her, coins aren't money; they're charity.

Permitted Worship

Lastly and amazingly, the only imagery allowed in the Temple, in seeming contradiction to G-d's command, "You shall not make images with Me," was that of children.

Apparently, other than Himself, G-d allows only one other form of worship: the worship of our children's education.

Then again, aren't they one and the same?

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On the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh (the new month of) Adar, we read an additional portion of the Torah about the half-Shekel tax. After the Exodus, the half-Shekel collection was a way to count the people as well as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. In later generations, the monies collected from the half shekel tax were used to buy animals for the communal offerings. Contributing to the tax gave people a share in the offerings and a means for atonement.

The Mishnah writes: "On the first of Adar, the court announces the collection of [half] shekels. And they also proclaim regarding the obligation to uproot forbidden mixtures of diverse kinds of food crops in gardens and fields."

What is the connection between the half-shekel tax and Kilayim, the prohibition of forbidden mixtures? Why does the Mishnah lump the two together?

Simply put, they are both timely. Animals for the sacrifices were generally purchased in the month of Nissan. As Adar is one month before Nissan, the people were being given one month's notice. It was also the beginning of the growing season, when one could discern whether one's fields and orchards were growing mixed species. Hence, both were announced on Rosh Chodesh Adar.

Now, let's go a little deeper. When it came to Shekalim there was a certain equality at play. "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a Shekel." It made no difference what one could afford to give; rich or poor, everyone gave the same half-Shekel, indicating that we all have the same inherent worth.

But then there's Kilayim, the prohibition against growing different species together. Apparently, we are not one and the same. Differences do exist, and we should not blur the lines between things that are inherently diverse.

The United States Declaration of Independence contains those memorable words penned by

Thomas Jefferson in 5536 (1776): "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

I cannot imagine that anyone would take issue with these noble sentiments, but while we all may be created equal, are we all the same? Clearly not.

While Shekalim preaches unity, Kilayim teaches diversity. Yes, we should treat all people with equal respect, compassion, and dignity, but we can still acknowledge the differences between us. The unity of the half-shekel contributed by everyone equally is offset and counterbalanced by the unique nature of each individual.

In the Havdalah prayer recited after Shabbat, we speak of some of these differences. "Blessed be G-d... Who distinguishes between the sacred and the mundane, between light and darkness, and between Israel and the nations."

Confusing light with darkness, the holy with the ordinary, and Judaism with other ideologies is neither wise nor honest.

Blurring the lines of Jewish identity risks diluting the very thing that makes us Jewish. We must be warm, loving, and accommodating to all, but that doesn't mean that everything is the same for everyone. All things to all people usually boils down to no things for no people.

Making believe we are all the same may sound noble, but in the end, it only obfuscates and muddles our unique, respective realities.

Shekalim and Kilayim appear together in the same Mishnah to remind us that while we are indeed all equal, we are, in fact, not all the same. And both approaches are true and necessary.

Does it seem to be contradictory? It may well. But this is the reality of life. You know the line about the teacher who told his student, "You are unique! Just like everyone else in this class." And both are absolutely true.

Long ago, the Talmud taught us, "Just as no two faces are identical so, too, are no two mindsets identical." We don't have to be the same, act the same, earn the same, or think the same in order to love and respect one another. We may be very

different from each other, but we each have our own unique and distinctively different characters and life missions to fulfill. May our individuality shine through and, together, may we all get the job done to bring the world to its ultimate fulfillment.

*By Rabbi Yossy Goldman
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TERUMAH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Terumah," means "Offering" and it is found in Exodus 25:2.

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials - gold, silver and copper; blue, purple and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems - out of which, G-d says to Moses, "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them."

On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled, transported, and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.

In the Sanctuary's inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark's cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the "showbread" was arranged.

The Sanctuary's three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and Tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts.

Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 26 Shevat 5785 - 24 February 2025
Passing of the Taz (1667)

26 Shevat is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi David ben Shmuel Halevi (5346-5427, or 1586-1667), a primary Halachic authority, known as Taz after his work Turei Zahav (lit. "Rows of Gold") - a commentary on Rabbi Yosef Caro's Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law).

Wednesday, 28 Shevat 5785 - 26 February 2025
Hasmonean Holiday (circa 134 BCE)

On Shevat 28 circa 3626 (134 BCE), Greek ruler Antiochus V abandoned his siege of Jerusalem and his plans for the city's destruction. This day was observed as a holiday in Hasmonean times.

Thursday, 29 Shevat 5785 - 27 February 2025

Columbia Tragedy; Israeli Astronaut Perishes (2003)

On the morning of 29 Shevat 5763 (February 1, 2003), the Columbia Space Shuttle, returning from its STS-107 mission, was destroyed upon re-entry, 16 minutes before its scheduled landing. All its crew members perished, including Ilan Ramon, a combat pilot in the Israeli Air Force, who was the first Israeli astronaut. Prior to his departing to space on Columbia, he arranged to take kosher food as well as a Kiddush cup, a Torah Scroll, and a dollar from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of righteous memory.

Shabbat, 1 Adar 5785 - 1 March 2025

Plague of Darkness (1313 BCE)

The 9th plague to strike the Egyptians for their refusal to release the Children of Israel from slavery was a

thick darkness that blanketed the land so that "no man saw his fellow, and no man could move from his place" - Exodus 10:23. It commenced on the 1st of Adar, six weeks before the Exodus.

Passing of Ibn Ezra (1164)

The highly regarded Biblical commentator, Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (born circa 4849, or 1089), passed away on Adar 1, 4924 (1164).

Passing of Shach (1663)

1 Adar is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of the great Halachist Rabbi Shabtai Hakohen Katz (5381-5423, or 1621-1663), author of the Siftei Cohen commentary on Rabbi Yosef Caro's Code of Jewish Law. He is known as "Shach" - an acronym of the name of his work, which serves to this day as a primary source of Halachah (Jewish law).