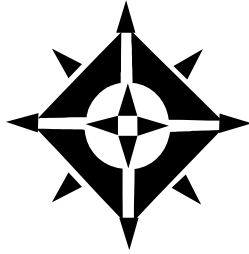


A Year of Encompassing Torah



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Parashat Pekudei

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This is how we shall accrue our mitzvah points:

**Barukh atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam,  
Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah...**

**Praised are You Adonai, our God,  
The Sovereign of all worlds,  
Who has made us holy with your mitzvot,  
And commanded us to engage ourselves  
with words of torah.**

***To be fully engaged with Torah  
Is to wrestle with Torah –  
To challenge our tradition while loving it,  
To question it while celebrating it.***

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**An Added Blessing
For Spiritual Direction**

*"Yihyu l'ratzon imrey fi v'higion libi
lifaneycha Hashem Tzuri v'Go'ali*

May the expressions of my mouth
and **the thoughts of my heart**
find favor before You, G-d,
my Rock and my Redeemer."



**Parashat Pekudei 5768
When Is Having It All
Isn't Enough?**

As a parent of two teenagers, I am embroiled in a situation that is not so unfamiliar in many other homes where there are signs of material abundance. What are those signs? Perhaps it is a television in more than one room, or a large screen HDTV in one room, a cell phone and an iPod for every person in the home. For others a sign of luxury is an extra refrigerator in the basement or the garage, and a closet that is too small to hold all of the clothes that we own. The argument that I have been having with my teenagers can be summed up in the Yiddish phrase, "*ginug*," or its Passover equivalent, "*dayeinu*" – ENOUGH ALREADY! When did having it all not be enough to satisfy our needs? While I blame my children for their insatiable appetites for more, what I truly ought to be doing is blaming myself for that same attitude. I take a look at my home and all of the "stuff" that clutters each room, taking inventory of all the things that I have collected in a life time of consuming, and I have no one else to blame. They learned it from me!

One would think that with all this much stuff I should be happy with what I got. However, like many others I find myself dissatisfied and perhaps even more unhappy – because there is so much more I would rather have. I live with the mentality that with one more card of Hank Greenberg, for instance, I would be more enamored of my collection and what I have achieved to put together. Not really! I am still missing the card that was issued the year before that one, and one before that. Without them, the collection is incomplete -- and so are my feelings in relation to it. The reason for my unhappiness, in retrospect, comes from not so much being bored by the collection, for I am truly invested in

what I have been able to assemble. Rather, my feelings of inadequacy revolve around being overwhelmed by the sheer volume the project and the need to do more.

In reading the final chapters of Exodus, I have come to realize with the help of Rabbi Bradley Artson and his insights into this week's Torah portion (University of Judaism, 5765), this is not a problem that is unique to this generation. Even the generation of Israelites who wandered in the wilderness suffered in a similar fashion despite our perception that they were impoverished as slaves in Egypt. Given the description of what was donated so freely by the Children of Israel for the fashioning of a place suitable for God, it appears that they brought much of their wealth with them, which would explain the nature of their complaints to Moses when they were forced to do without many things that they once had in Egypt.

We are told by psychologists that everything is relative. While the Israelites were pushed to their limit as slaves, it appears as though the meaning of life was changed dramatically when they entered the wilderness. One of the reasons why they grumbled so much, was not because of the hardship of being in the wilderness itself, rather they complained because they had so little to do to keep themselves occupied. As the Bible tells us, God gave them manna each morning to sustain them, and Miriam provided them with water. And according to one midrash, their shoes never needed mending and their clothing never wore out. So, what was a person to do to fill one's time with a sense of purpose and to direct one's energy towards attaining a worthy goal?

Perhaps God had made a mistake in taking care of *all* of their material needs. Like a good parent, God found a way to occupy the Children of Israel. God gave the people a project. Did God need a place for the Divine presence to dwell? Not necessarily. It was the people who needed a place to focus their energy when relating to God. And having them build it gave the people an even greater sense of direction. No wonder why they were so enthusiastic to give up some of their wealth as well as their time to build a place for God! In fact, during the past several weeks when the Torah has focused itself on all of the detail work that went into the construction of the Mishkan and the vestments for the priests and the various utensils for the

work upon the altar, not a single word of grumbling is mentioned. No complaints, no bickering, not a negative word is recorded during the building of the Mishkan – which leads us to believe that when people are engaged in meaningful activity, kvetching is no longer a necessity to living “happy”. Serving God gave them a singular purpose that enabled them to forget the fact that God had provided them with “almost” everything that they needed to endure the wilderness experience. In addition, working on the Mishkan enabled them to not only build character, but also to build on developing their sense of community.

Given that we all face the same challenges that our ancestors of the wilderness had to experience, how do we create lives that are significant, where we learn to make a difference in this world? If there is a single lesson that I would like my children to learn it is the notion that true wealth is never measured by the material riches that we accumulate in this world. Rather, our wealth is measured in terms of our giving – of ourselves, through the performance of mitzvot. This is what gives us purpose in life. As Rabbi Artson articulates:

“The task of wresting meaning out of existence, of fashioning purpose out of mere being, is the great challenge of being human, and the great gift of Judaism. By holding out to us the opportunity to perform mitzvot at every turn, upon waking, at every meal, in every encounter with another human being, in repeated moments of prayer and contemplation, *we erect a Mishkan of deeds*, a structure of purpose and holiness that can launch our souls on a flight of discovery and of fulfillment.”

As the Book of Exodus comes to a close and we look ahead at the priestly book of Leviticus, may we dedicate ourselves to building lives of holiness, by collecting our deeds as testimonies to God that the meaning in life is in the act of doing rather than in the act of being, by our giving away a part of ourselves and our abundance we receive the blessings that are a part of God's creation.