

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Ruth bas Leopold,
Joe Friedman's Grandmother. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI

Too Little, Too Late

The princes brought the Shoham stones and the filling stones for the apron and the breastplate (35:27).

At the very end of the list of contributors to the Mishkan we find the *Nesi'im* – the heads of the tribes who offered to make up the deficit of whatever wasn't donated by the rest of Bnei Yisroel. Little did they realize that the Jewish people's first capital campaign would be such a runaway success. Not only did Bnei Yisroel donate everything that was needed (and even extra), but they closed the entire capital campaign after exactly two days!

As Rashi (ad loc) explains, "What was it that the princes saw that made them contribute first at the inauguration of the *mizbeach*, while they did not contribute first in the construction of the Mishkan? Since they saw that Bnei Yisroel had contributed everything that was needed, they wondered, 'What is left for us to do?' They therefore brought the *Shoham* stones and the filling stones. Therefore, by the inauguration of the *mizbeach* they were the first to contribute. And because they were lazy at the outset a letter was removed from their name." (The letter "yud" should have appeared twice in the word *Nesi'im* but does not.)

On the surface, this explanation seems hard to understand. After all, the *Nesi'im* had offered to deficit fund the entire project. This is every fundraiser's dream. Why are they so deeply criticized that their very name is dishonored? Moreover, why are they called lazy? Just the fact that they didn't do something right away doesn't necessarily mean that they are lazy. What is the definition of laziness?

The Torah is teaching us one of the tenets of Judaism and something that is unfortunately often not fully appreciated as a basic axiom of life and living.

A lazy person can be defined as someone who needs something external for motivation. For example, a student has a paper due but waits until the last possible moment – the time when if the paper isn't done he will flunk out of class. The external pressure of losing the course is the reason he does the paper. This is laziness.

There is an absolutely astounding Rashi in *Gemara Brachos* (6b). The Gemara states, "Said R' Zeira, 'The main reward from attending a Torah lecture is that of running to hear it.'" Rashi (ad loc) explains, "Most of those that go to hear a class from a Torah scholar do not understand it well enough to repeat it later (which would constitute learning Torah), therefore the main reward is not for studying Torah but for running to hear the class."

There is a very deep principle of life in this Rashi, one that most people know but choose to actively ignore: Life isn't about what one achieves, it's about the effort made to achieve it.

Reward comes solely from the effort we make, not from the circumstances in which we place ourselves. In other words, if we listen and even understand a beautiful Torah lecture, it is rather pointless unless we make some real effort to acquire it. We have to work at it,



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merely understanding it is a gift from Hashem who gave us the capacity to understand. We need to make an effort, whether it is to teach it to someone else or to create our own insights, the only thing that begets reward is the effort we make.

Likewise, if we merely go to shul and *daven* by rote, without focus or effort to achieve something through *davening*, in terms of receiving reward, it is as if we haven't done anything at all.

This theme is repeated again in the Gemara (*Brachos* 6b): "Rava said the reward derived from a *halachic* discussion is the reasoning involved." Once again, Rashi explains: "The effort and exertion and mental effort expended to understand the *halachic* reasoning is the basis by which one gets rewarded."

Simple accumulation of Torah knowledge by osmosis isn't necessarily worthy of a reward from Hashem. We must expend significant effort to acquire it and/or teach it to receive a reward from Hashem.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 75a) explains that along with the *manna* came precious stones and jewelry. How? It was brought by the clouds. The Gemara uses our *possuk* to teach this lesson. In Hebrew, the word for clouds is the same as the word

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for princes – “Nesi'im.” Thus the jewels were brought by the clouds; they may have been delivered to the Mishkan through the princes, but since they had made no effort (i.e. they had just received these jewels with the *manna*) they are called lazy. Thus, in the Gemara, the *Nesi'im* (princes) actually do not receive any credit for bringing the precious stones as they didn't make any effort.

Girl Power!

He made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of those that congregated; the ones that had congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (38:3).

The copper washstand, otherwise known as the *kiyor*, was used primarily to dispense waters on the hands and feet of the Kohanim to sanctify them prior to their service in the Mishkan. Rashi (ad loc) relates a fascinating incident pertaining to its creation: “The daughters of Israel had in their possession copper mirrors which they would look into when they would beautify themselves, even these mirrors they did not withhold from bringing for the contribution toward the Mishkan. But Moshe rejected them because they were made for the evil inclination. The Holy One, Blessed is He, said: ‘Accept them, for they are dearest to Me of all, for through them the women established legions in Egypt.’”

Rashi goes on to detail how the women used these mirrors to entice their husbands to procreate, and presumably Moshe was loathe to accept these mirrors for they were used for impure purposes. Many commentaries question why Moshe was willing to accept all sorts of personal items from the women including “armbands, nose-rings, finger-rings, and chastity belts” (see 35:22) and initially

refused their mirrors. Aside from the fact that most of those items were used to make themselves more attractive, the chastity belts in particular seem to be wholly inappropriate for use in the Mishkan. So, ask the commentators, “Why did Moshe accept those items yet reject the mirrors?” (*Maharal* 35:22).


Perhaps as perplexing – where in the *pesukim* do Chazal see that Moshe had initially rejected them until Hashem told him how precious they were in His eyes?

Chazal are bothered by the language of the verse; “the mirrors of those that congregated, the ones that congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.” By all the other gifts to the Mishkan the Torah repeatedly describes the donator with lofty language: “everyone who is generous of spirit moved him” or “generous heart.” Yet there is no such designation for those women that came to give the mirrors to the Mishkan. Why not?

Remarkably, the gift of the mirrors was different from all the other donations to the Mishkan. Every other item given to


the Mishkan was melted down to be used wherever needed. But the women came “en masse” to make a special request. They wanted to designate their mirrors to be a perpetual monument to what they had done in Egypt. They wanted the *kiyor*, which symbolizes purity and sanctification, be created solely from their mirrors to recognize their achievement.

Moshe happily had accepted all types of personal items as donations to the Mishkan, even those items that were of a VERY personal nature. But he was loathe to set aside a specific vessel of the Mishkan to be designated to remembering something that he felt was a tool of the *yetzer hara*. He argued with the women and initially rejected their plea, and for this reason the Torah tells us that they congregated, and even refers to it as “the mirrors of those that congregated.” This gathering was to protest Moshe's rejection and refusal to give them a lasting testament. Hashem comes to their rescue and explains how these mirrors were most precious of all.



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