YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat PEKUDEI**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

**Shabbat and the Gift Offerings to the *Mishkan***

Translated by David Strauss

**Obedience and Expression**

Rashi, at the beginning of *Parashat Ki-Tisa*, notes that three different gift offerings were made to the *Mishkan*:

One was the offering that was to be used for the making of the sockets [*adanim*], for he counted them when they began to contribute toward the building of the *Mishkan*, when each gave a half-shekel, the total amounting to a hundred talents, as it is stated: "And the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation was a hundred talents" (*Shemot* 38:25), and of these the sockets were made, as it is stated: "And of the hundred talents of silver [were cast the sockets of the sanctuary]" (*Shemot* 38:27). The second offering was also levied by way of census, for he numbered them again after the *Mishkan* was erected; that is the census referred to in the beginning of the book of *Bamidbar*: "[And the Lord spoke to Moshe}… on the first day of the second month in the second year… [Take you the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel]" (*Bamidbar* 1:1), and on that occasion too, each of them gave a half-shekel. These were employed in purchasing the communal sacrifices for each year. Both rich and poor were made alike in regard to these half-shekels; and it is with reference to this offering that Scripture uses here the expression "to atone for your souls," for sacrifices were made in order to make atonement. The third offering was that offered for the building of the *Mishkan*, as it is stated: "Every man that did offer an offering of silver and brass" (*Shemot* 35:24). In this offering, however, they did not all participate alike, but each one brought whatever his heart prompted him to give. (Rashi, *Shemot* 30:15)

Two of the offerings were fixed, "half of a shekel after the shekel of holiness" – for the sockets and for the communal offerings. The third offering, for the building of the *Mishkan*, was not of a fixed amount; instead, each person contributed as his heart desired.

What is the difference between a fixed obligation and an offering of the heart?

A fixed obligation involves acceptance of authority; there is no discretion. The rich do not give more, and the poor do not give less. With a fixed obligation, there is equality; gaps between classes are erased, and rich and poor are treated alike.

Giving of the heart is just the opposite: each person determines what and how much to give. Where there is discretion, there is danger of arrogance, and, of course, the danger of emphasizing differences between the classes. The rich man might claim that it is thanks to him that the *menora* is lit and the communal offerings are brought, because he donated such a large amount of gold.

On the other hand, offerings of the heart allow room for personal expression. A person sees the importance of a certain enterprise and decides to allocate more resources to that project in relation to others. The Torah does not expect man only to accept authority and follow orders with blind obedience. The Torah also seeks man's inner feeling, the love that pulsates in his heart. The Torah seeks the Man in man.

What we have before us, then, is tension between a rigid framework and personal expression, between the value of equality and the equally important value that one who has more should indeed give more. The Torah sets boundaries for this tension in its division between the different realms of offerings: there are fixed donations and there are personal gifts.

The fixed donations are in two fundamental areas, which the Torah does not want or cannot give up on:

1. The offering to be used for the sockets of the *Mishkan*, upon which the entire *Mishkan* rests. The foundation of the *Mishkan* must be a cooperative effort and every individual must donate to it in equal measure. It should be noted that not only the sockets [*adanim*] were made from the offering of the half-shekel, but also the hooks of the columns [*vavei ha-amudim*]: "And of the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of holiness, and the sockets of the partition veil; a hundred sockets of the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. And of the thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels he made hooks for the columns, and overlaid their capitals, and made fasteners for them" (*Shemot* 38:27-28).

2. The funds for the communal offerings – the fixed sacrificial service that included daily offerings as well as the *musafim* (additional offerings on Shabbat and holidays) – were collected equally from all members of Israel, regardless of their financial means.

On the other hand, contributions to the *Mishkan* in general are open to personal discretion and allow for the expression of generosity and personal desire and sacrifice. After making sure that every individual member of Israel has an equal share in the foundation, the Torah makes it possible for those who so desire to leave their personal mark.

The importance of a fixed, obligatory contribution lies in the fact that it creates a mechanism of humility, of standing before God in silence and submission. Throughout *Parashat Pekudei* and the various stages of the *Mishkan*’s construction, the Torah repeats many times the phrase: "And he made… as the Lord commanded Moshe." *Chazal* emphasize that this phrase heaps praise on Moshe and Aharon that they did not deviate from the Divine command. Here we see the idea of submission, of doing precisely as one is told, without the slightest change – as the Lord commanded.

This is the balance that must be reached between the two tendencies.

**The Balance of Creation**

It is not only in the construction of the *Mishkan* that we find tension between obligation and submission, on the one hand, and innovation and breakthrough, on the other. This dual trend also appears in the very building of the world, which was given to man to develop and perfect – "which God created, to do" (*Bereishit* 2:3). On the one hand, man is expected to act in the world and advance it technologically, scientifically, and morally; on the other hand, man must always remember his boundaries and the submission expected of him – that the castle has a leader.

This, in my opinion, is the essence of the *mitzva* of Shabbat, which demands of man that he desist from the creative endeavors in which he is engaged during the rest of the week, in order to deepen his consciousness of submission and living before God, the master of the world. The source of the world's energy that makes the entire creative process possible is fire, and lighting a fire is the only forbidden Shabbat labor explicitly mentioned in the Torah. The Torah emphasizes, "You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations" (*Shemot* 35:3) – the creative process must be stopped throughout the human realm.

This submission is meant not only to restrain human endeavor, but also to bring man to consider well his own limitations, so that the world that he builds will not ignore the moral and ethical line that is required of human creation. Unrestrained development can bring, and in fact has brought, heavy moral injustices. The mitzvaof Shabbat comes, as formulated by the Ramban (*Shemot* 20:8), "to turn us away from transient thoughts and vanities, to allow our souls to delight in the ways of God, and that we should go to the sages and the prophets to hear the words of God." Shabbat is a time of ethics, of internalizing God’s desire for a perfected and upright world.

**Decisions of the Heart**

Let us return to the wisdom of the heart that is mentioned so many times in the *parashot* dealing with the *Mishkan.* It would seem that the seat of wisdom is in the head, and not in the heart, but we often use the phrase "matters that sit well in the heart." That is to say, along with applying reason in the proper measure, it is important to operate the heart, which at times examines matters from a different perspective – the emotional perspective of morality and ethics. There exists a certain tension between reason and emotion – between the mind and the heart – together with the balance that is needed between the desire to break out, to create, and to innovate, on one hand, and the need to weigh on the scales of the heart whether the matter is worthy, on the other. This tension plays an important role. One who is wise of heart combines the wisdom of his mind with the feelings of his heart, and channels his life’s paths and the world of God in wonderful harmony.

In modern times, we often see man breach his boundaries, with less awareness of the need for constraint. Perhaps this is a reason that God sends reminders that with all of the innovation, there is a need for internal and moral recognition that we are servants of the Creator of the universe.

This is the meaning of "You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day" – the limits of human endeavor. These boundaries bestow upon man feelings of peace and freedom, which prevent him from becoming utterly enslaved to an infinite striving for control. One who seeks to rule without boundaries will ultimately find himself being ruled. It is precisely the letting go and resting that bestow an unbounded treasure, this being the portion of our holy Shabbat. "He who delights in Shabbat is given an unbounded portion" (*Shabbat* 118a).

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