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 Mosheh Lichtenstein**

**"These Are the Accountings of the *Mishkan*"**

Summarized by Nadav Schultz

Translated by David Strauss

These are the accountings [*pekudei*]of the *Mishkan*, the *Mishkan* of the testimony, as they were rendered according to the commandment of Moshe, through the service of the Levites, by the hand of Itamar, the son of Aharon the priest. (*Shemot* 38:21)

Some commentators understood the word "*pekudei*" as referring to the enumeration of the contributions that follows:

All the gold that was used for the work in all the work of the sanctuary, the gold of the offering, was twenty-nine talents and 730 shekels by the shekel of the sanctuary. And the silver of those who were numbered of the congregation was a hundred talents, and 1,775 shekels by the shekel of the sanctuary… And the hundred talents of silver were for casting the sockets of the sanctuary, and the sockets of the curtain (*parokhet*): a hundred sockets for the hundred talents, a talent per socket. And of the 1,775 shekels he made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their tops, and bound them. And the bronze of the offering was seventy talents and 2,400 shekels. And he made with it the sockets to the door of the tent of meeting, and the bronze altar and its bronze grating, and all the vessels of the altar, and the sockets of the court round about, and the sockets of the gate of the court, and all the pegs of the *Mishkan*, and all the pegs of the court round about. (*Shemot* 38:24-31)

What is the point of the Torah's account keeping? Why does it describe the sum of the contributions as if it were the report of an accountant? To suggest an answer to this question, we will try to read the *Parashot Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* as a response to the sin of the golden calf.

At the time of the sin, Aharon, wishing to delay the process, asks the people for their jewelry:

And Aharon said to them: Break off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them to me. And all the people broke off the golden rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aharon. (*Shemot* 32:2-3)

The people quickly hand over their jewelry to Aharon. Aside from their considerable monetary value, a person’s jewels also reflect his identity, and it is therefore unlikely that they would be easily relinquished. However, perhaps to Aharon's surprise, the people respond immediately to his request – demonstrating their great enthusiasm for the sin.

Consequently, when the sin is rectified – with the construction of the *Mishkan* – the level of enthusiasm had to be at least be equal to that of the sin. This is reflected in *Parashat Vayakhel*, where the Torah describes:

And they received from before Moshe all the donation that the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it. And they brought to him more freewill offerings every morning. And all the wise men, who were doing all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they were doing. And they said to Moshe, saying: “The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the Lord commanded to make.” And Moshe commanded, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying: Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the donation of the sanctuary!” So the people were restrained from bringing. And the work was sufficient for them for all the work to make it, and more. (*Shemot* 36:3-7)

Thus, the contributions for the *Mishkan* in *Parashat Vayakhel* constitute a repair for the contributions for the golden calf. But what is the point of *Parashat* *Pekudei*?

It would seem that *Parashat Pekudei* constitutes a repair of another aspect of the sin of the golden calf. If we return to the people's relieving themselves of their jewelry, we are astonished: What could have possessed the people to do this? It could only be that there was a pervasive atmosphere of despair that spread through the camp, stemming from the people's sense that they were destined to die in the wilderness and causing them to lose all sense of the world's value. After all, a person standing on the deck of the Titanic as it sinks has no difficulty in throwing a great deal of money into the water, for what good will all that wealth do him if he will die imminently?

It seems that this was Aharon's mistake. How could such a great man have erred and created the calf? Apparently, Aharon misread the map. His assessment was that the people were somewhat alarmed, and therefore they needed to be delayed just until Moshe would come down from the mountain – nothing more. According to this understanding, he thought the request for golden jewelry would not be answered immediately, and he would be able to buy more time. But he did not recognize the heavy despair that hung over the people, which became evident in their wild and unbridled readiness to hand over all their possessions to the "god" who would go before them. When Aharon finally recognized this despair, it was already too late – the people had given him a great deal of gold and demanded that he fashion the calf immediately.

As we have noted, the construction of the *Mishkan* constitutes the repair of the sin of the golden calf; in a measure-for-measure fashion, it demanded a reversal of the spirit behind the sin. Since the sin was in part a product of the despair that pervaded the nation, its rectification required a reversal of thinking – not out of despair, but out of great hope.

This is precisely the accountancy that is described at the beginning of the *parasha*. The meticulous exactitude of the accounting of the place and use of each and every contribution reflects the new spirit that was beginning to animate the people. Each contribution held intrinsic and unique significance, and required care to ensure that it would not be misapplied but would find its proper place in the construction of the *Mishkan.* This sort of feeling is not at all present in a people steeped in despair, awaiting their death. When the people itemize the various contributions in detail, it is as if they are proclaiming: "There is a future; there is significance to what we do!"

Beyond the two "focused" corrections we have seen, the very story of *Parashot Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* teaches about the power of repentance. In *Parashot Teruma* and *Tetzaveh* we were presented with an idealized and exalted plan: the building of a sanctuary for the *Shekhina* in our midst. However, as we see on a daily basis, many plans do not come to fruition, even if they have some degree of success. This would certainly be true, seemingly, of a plan that never had a chance – that even before it was presented to the people, they committed such a grievous sin as the sin of the golden calf.

*Parashot Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* come and repeat verbatim the commandments found in *Parashot Teruma* and *Tetzaveh* in order to emphasize that despite the grave sin committed by the people, the *Mishkan* was ultimately erected exactly as it was supposed to be erected, according to the original plan. The ability to maintain the same level of religious connection between the people and their God, despite the sin, derives from the great power of repentance.

The power of repentance is manifested most clearly in Aharon’s transformation into the High Priest in the *Mishkan*. A *midrash* on *Parashat Shemini* states:

"Draw near to the altar" (*Vayikra* 9:7)… Others say: Aharon perceived the (horned) altar as an ox and was frightened by it, whereupon Moshe said to him: “My brother, are you afraid of that? Embolden yourself and draw near to it.” Therefore it says: "Draw near to the altar." (*Sifra*, *Shemini* 1, 8)

The *midrash* addresses an obvious point: How could Aharon, the creator of the calf, become the head of the *Mishkan*, whose very purpose was to atone for the sin of the calf that Aharon had created?! This is proof of the great power of repentance; it can even transform Aharon into the head of the *Mishkan* that atones for the sin he himself caused.

The Torah thus teaches us a tremendous lesson about the power and greatness of repentance, that it can turn the tables around completely. May we merit to repent each and every day: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity" (*Hoshea* 14:2).

(This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein on Shabbat *Parashat Pekudei* 5779.)

(Edited by Sarah Rudolph)