

Parshat Pekudei: Beautiful Blessings

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

After the completion of the *Mishkan*, Moshe blesses *Bnei Yisroel*: "May the pleasantness of my Lord, our God, be upon us — our handiwork, establish for us..." The *Mikdash Halevi* asks, would not Hashem's *Shechinah* coming down into the Tabernacle be a blessing in itself? Why was Moshe moved to offer another blessing?

Be'er Hatorah quotes the *Zohar*, that counting things tends to negate their blessings. Here, at the conclusion of the construction, every "dollar" donated was being counted. Perhaps, feared Moshe, this would negate the blessing and Hashem's presence would not descend into the *Mishkan*. However, notes Rabbi M. Miller, one can count egocentrically or altruistically. Egocentric counting is selfish. It counts what I have and can therefore be arrogant, or count what others have and be jealous of them. It has a negative perspective. In contrast, the positive, "good" eye sees everything as coming from its Source and is meant to be used for positive purposes. Bilaam is the quintessential model of counting with an evil eye. Moshe Rabbenu, on the other hand, was counting all the donations for the *Mishkan* as both coming from Hashem and as being used in His service. When connected to Hashem, the negativity of curses does not apply.

Rabbi Weinberg notes that the blessing could not be that the Divine Presence should descend to dwell in the *Mishkan*; after all, that was Hashem's specific command. What Moshe was saying was that the building of the *Mishkan* should impact all the other work of our hands, that it be holy and pure. As

Mikdash Halevi says, Moshe's focus was not on the *Mishkan*, but on sanctifying the works of our hands in a mundane world so that Hashem's spirit can reside there. Laundry or housecleaning can be elevated by focusing on the goal of creating a space clean and worthy of Hashem's presence. And although each person's path may have different curves in the road, and every person uses a different vehicle in his travels, the destination of service to Hashem should be the same so that the sanctity of the *Mishkan* remains with us in our daily lives.

On *Yom Tov* we pray, "...Let the blessings of Your festivals carry us for life..." Rabbi Biederman explains that we should carry the sanctity of the holiday forward into our everyday lives. It is this idea that is the basis for the custom of some people to recite this Psalm 90 each week after Havdalah, to verbalize carrying the blessings of *Shabbat* into the workweek, adds the Sifsei Chaim. Torat Maharim suggests that Moshe was afraid that *Bnei Yisroel* would become arrogant seeing the success of their work and perhaps Hashem's presence wouldn't descend into the *Mishkan*. With this blessing, Moshe was emphatically reminding *Bnei Yisroel* that the success of this project was all due to Hashem. Their main contribution was their desire and passion to serve Hashem. This same desire to serve Hashem should infuse all that we do. When we then follow up and begin acting on that desire, even if we doubt, we have the skills to finish the project, Hashem will bless our endeavors.

Taking that first step is always challenging, but

that challenge is Hashem's test of our commitment, writes *Letitcha Elyon*. When Hashem sees our effort in spite of the difficulties, Hashem is moved to help us succeed. The *Mishkan* itself was erected with this pattern. First Moshe erected the *Mishkan*, took the initiative, and then Hashem finished the process, writes Rabbi Roberts. Every person must understand that success begins with your desire followed by your effort. Then Hashem will do the rest. Moshe was telling *Bnei Yisroel* that Hashem's Presence coming down and remaining in the *Mishkan* was dependent on their desire, not on the completion of the structure. Desire is like a muscle that must be exercised. Rabbi Wolbe writes, to strengthen your desire to be closer to Hashem, you must look for opportunities to bring Him closer.

When the *Mishkan* was completed, Moshe beheld it, "*Vehineil* and behold, an expression of joy. When Moshe saw the passion *Bnei Yisroel* exhibited in constructing the *Mishkan*, writes Rabbi Moshe Bick, he blessed *Bnei Yisroel* that all the *mitzvot* their hands perform should be completed with this same sense of joy, whenever and wherever you do them. As it says in *Shir Hashirim*, "... On the day of his marriage, on the day of his profound joy." The marriage refers to accepting the *Torah* at *Sinai*, and profound joy refers to the house, the *Beit Hamikdash*, and its precursor, the *Mishkan*.. Moshe blessed *Bnei Yisroel* that the pleasantness of Hashem should always be upon us, in the work of our hands forever. Every *mitzvah* should be observed not only because we were so commanded, but with the joy of knowing the *mitzvah* is a special gift from above.

The Power of the Month of Adar

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

After the splitting of the Red Sea, all the nations were terribly afraid of the Jews. Then Amalek came and attacked the Jews in Refidim. Rashi explains, "*Rafu yedeihem min haTorah*." The Jewish people's hands were weakened from the *Torah*. This enabled Amalek to fight against them. Yehoshua took a group of Jews to fight them and Moshe went up on a hill together with Aharon and Chur. When Moshe lifted his hands, the Jews too

raised their thoughts and prayers to heaven and Hashem helped them win over Amalek. When Moshe's hands fell, Amalek triumphed.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger discusses lifting one's hand to heaven as a form of prayer. This leads us back to Yaakov and Esav. Yitzchak said, "the voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav." Hands symbolize action in this world. Hands develop and create. Esav

signifies practical accomplishments. Yaakov's strength is his voice as manifested in prayer and *Torah* study. Hands are capable of creating things that will stand on their own independently. Halacha states that a person must wash one's hands before prayer, because they are constantly busy touching things and perhaps unconsciously one may have touched an impure place. This indicates that hands act on their own. When man acts

Continued on page 2

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Continued from Page 1

with his hands he doesn't necessarily express his inner essence. This opens the possibility of disconnecting action from Hashem, who is the source of all creation. Esav was a man of accomplishment, but he attributed it all to himself. In contrast, voice expresses one's inner essence, thoughts, and feelings. It exists only as long as the person is alive. This signifies Yaakov's constant attachment to Hashem.

Chazal say that the verse, "*Vahaya emunat itecha*," hints to the first order of the Mishna, Sedar Zeraim (the laws of agriculture). Seeds, if ground into flour, can be made into food. Why should a farmer put it in the ground to rot and disintegrate? It can only be that he has faith in Hashem who will make the seeds grow and give him more than he invested. If I apply for a job and I do everything necessary

to get it, in reality there's no link between what I did and the results. Hashem made me get the job, although it may not be so obvious. But with planting it's all quite obvious. Only Hashem can make the seeds grow. Therefore, Chazal considered planting a paradigm of faith.

Esav sees his accomplishment as the fruits of his own labor. Yaakov sees Hashem creating something for him unrelated to what he did. Esav lives for momentarily pleasure, while Yaakov pursues a greater goal. When a Jew plants, he has in mind the fruit that will grow in *Gan Eden*. In contrast, Esav's prime interest is the fruit in this world.

Our way of life tells Esav that his life is meaningless. Hitler wrote that the Jewish people are our conscious and we must destroy them. Chazal say that when the Torah was

given at Sinai, "*Sinah yardah l'olam*." (Hatred came down to this world.) Our very existence gives vexes the nations. Lifting our hands to heaven symbolizes the admission that our ability to accomplish is from Hashem.

When the Jews were in Refidim they asked, "*Hayesh Hashem b'kirbeinu*." (Is Hashem among us?) When their hands weakened and did not study Torah, when they felt weak in their connection to Hashem, Amalek was strengthened. When they turned to the Almighty, Amalek grew weak. Moshe's hands were heavy, because he had to lift the hands of the entire nation. He had to engender the *teshuva* that would raise every Jew's hands to Hashem. Chazal say that when the Jewish people submitted their hearts to heaven, when they recognized that ultimately it was all up to Hashem, Amalek fell.

Purim Inspiration: Esther's Role

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

Esther, the hero of the Purim story, is a fascinating study in contrasts. If we examine the beginning chapters of the Megilah she appears passive and even somewhat apathetic. Yet suddenly in the second half of the Megilah, she takes on an entirely different persona. Esther assertively directs Mordechai to gather the Jews and have them fast for three days. In fact, the Midrash describes a halachic debate which took place between them. While Mordechai protested that the Jews could not fast on Pesach, Esther argued that if all the Jews would be killed there would be no Pesach. And indeed she won out. The Megilah notes further, "*Va'yas Mordechai k'chol asher zivsa Esther*..."-Mordechai did all that Esther commanded. This is in striking contrast to the beginning of the Megilah where it says, "*Es mamar Mordechai Esther asa*,"-Esther followed all of Mordechai's wishes. The formerly passive Esther creative-

ly comes up with twelve different reasons as enumerated in Mesechta Megilah, for inviting Haman and Achashveirosh to a double feast. Later on in the Purim story, she convinces Achashveirosh to give her Haman's house, and then places Mordechai in charge. While at the beginning of the Megilah, Mordechai raised Esther, here Esther elevates Mordechai. After Haman was killed, it is Esther who again approaches the king to have the death sentence on the Jews rescinded. The Megilah continues to emphasize Esther's active role in writing down the Megilah and establishing Purim as a holiday.

Rav Lichtenstein asks the obvious question, what happened to Esther? How does she suddenly take on the role of an entirely different character? When Mordechai sent Hasach with a message for her to go to the king, she initially refused. Mordechai sent back

a message, "*Mi yodea im le's k'zos higat l'malchus*"-Who knows whether it was just for a time like this that Hashem selected you to become the queen. Mordechai gave her *mussar* and she took it to heart and was aroused to action. She resolved to drop her formerly passive behavior and use all her abilities to save *Klal Yisrael*. This is a lesson for all of us. Every Jew gifted with a unique ability, quality, or special power has a responsibility to use it in a productive way to help the Jewish people. This is what Mordechai told Esther and this is what we need to learn for our own lives, whether in our professional, personal, or general interactions with people. Mordechai's forthright words catalyzed Esther into action. It transformed her from a passive follower into a valiant hero who played a paramount role in saving the Jewish people.