**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TERUMA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

 One of the materials which *Benei Yisrael* were called upon to donate for the construction of the *Mishkan*, as we read in the beginning of Parashat Teruma, were “*orot techashim*” – skins of a creature called “*tachash*” (25:5). Later (26:14), the Torah commands that these skins be used to form the outermost covering of the *Mishkan*.

 Rashi, based on the Gemara (Shabbat 28b), identifies the “*tachash*” as a supernatural creature that God provided for *Benei Yisrael* only at that time, when they were in the wilderness, and specifically for the purpose of constructing the *Mishkan*. The Gemara further comments that the “*tachash*” was an animal that featured an impressive array of different colors. Onkelos translates “*tachash*” as “*sasgona*,” and the Gemara explains this Aramaic term to mean “*sas be-gevanim harbei*” – this animal “was joyous over its many colors.”

 Rav Yisrael of Modzitz, in *Divrei Yisrael*, suggests that the Gemara’s depiction of the *tachash* alludes to the many different “colors” that we experience over the course of our lives. As we go through life, we enjoy periods of success, achievement and happiness, and also endure moments of pain, anguish, frustration, failure and disappointment. We go from one “color” to the next – some bright and exciting, others dark and dreary. The Rebbe of Modzitz suggests that the *tachash*’s “joy” teaches us of the need to try to maintain a sense of joy and contentment throughout all the various stages of life, over the course of the many different “colors” that we experience. The *tachash* rejoiced over all its colors, serving as a symbol of the joy we can and should strive to feel at all different points of life, no matter which “color” characterizes our experiences at any given moment.

 The way this is accomplished, the Modzitzer Rebbe explains, is by recognizing the other quality of the *tachash* noted by the Gemara – that it was created by God specifically for that particular purpose at that particular time. Every situation that we confront must be viewed as a “*tachash*” – an opportunity provided by the Almighty, an item we need to use for the “*Mishkan*” that we are to strive to build over the course of our lives. This “*Mishkan*,” our life of Torah and *mitzvot*, must consist of numerous different “colors,” just as the *Mishkan* in the wilderness was covered by a majestic, multicolored tapestry. And thus every situation that God sends our way, including the bleaker “shades” that we would have preferred to avoid, contributes to our “*Mishkan*,” to our inner sanctuary, to our spiritual being that we are to mold over the course of life. Understanding this, the Rebbe of Modzitz teaches, enables us to remain upbeat and joyful throughout all our different “shades” of life, even in periods of difficulty and hardship. If we view every challenge as a “*tachash*” created specifically for us, to be used for building our individual *Mishkan*, then we can embrace it, rather than resent it, and feel happiness and joy as we proceed from one “color” to the next in our effort to the build our “*Mishkan*,” the beautiful Torah life that we are meant to live.

Sunday

 Yesterday, we saw the Gemara’s comments in Masekhet Shabbat (28b) concerning the *tachash* – the animal whose skins were used for outermost covering of the *Mishkan*, as mentioned in Parashat Teruma (25:5). The Gemara notes Onkelos’ Aramaic translation of “*tachash*” as “*sasgona*,” and explains this term to mean, “*sas be-gevanim harbei*” – this animal “rejoiced” over its numerous colors. Moreover, the Gemara tells that this was a supernatural creature which God brought into the world just once – when *Benei Yisrael* were in the wilderness, for the specific and exclusive purpose of providing a colorful covering for the *Mishkan*.

 What might be the symbolic the significance of the *tachash*, as described by the Gemara?

 The *tachash* “rejoiced” over its colors – specifically because these were the colors it was given. We are all created with many beautiful “colors” – natural qualities, strengths, talents and capabilities, but many of us, unfortunately, lose these “colors” and allow them to fade, because we instead try to adopt the “colors” of others. Rather than nurture and cultivate our God-given talents, we instead try to follow a model set by others. We feel pressured to imitate the “colors” that other people exhibit, rather than “rejoicing” and taking pride in our own “colors,” recognizing our unique talent and potential, and working to actualize it to its fullest. The *tachash* celebrated its own “colors” because it recognized that it was created just once, that its colors were given to serve a particular purpose that was needed specifically at that time. If we see ourselves in this way, then we, too, will rejoice over our own “colors” instead of trying to adopt the “colors” of other people. We need to recognize that each person is placed on the earth only once, because he or she has a specific role to fill at that particular time and place – a role which no other human from any other time since the world’s creation can fill. If we see ourselves in this fashion, then we, like the *tachash*, would rejoice over our “colors,” our unique set of qualities and strengths. If we recognize that we are to fill a unique role that nobody else in world history can fill, then we will celebrate who we are and appreciate our singular characteristics without envying those of others.

 The Gemara thus teaches us to embrace and take pride in our unique potential and capabilities, to cultivate our talents and be the best version of ourselves that we can, without allowing our beautiful “colors” to fade as a result of the vain, futile attempt to be like other people.

Monday

 Parashat Teruma describes the *aron*, the ark that was situated in the inner chamber of the *Mishkan* and contained the stone tablets which Moshe received at Sinai (25:16). The *aron*, we read, was covered by a solid gold layer called the *kaporet*, which featured two “*keruvim*” (25:17-18). Rashi, based on the Gemara (Sukka 5b), explains that the *keruvim* were images of young children.

 The image of the *keruvim* has been viewed by many writers and *darshanim* over the centuries as a symbol of education, and a number of features of the *keruvim* were seen as indicative of various principles relevant to the education of children. For example, it is told that Rav Meir Shapiro made an observation – perhaps tongue-in-cheek – about the *halakha* forbidding fashioning the *keruvim* from any material other than gold. When *Benei Yisrael* could not afford the precious metals required for the various furnishings of the *Mishkan*, they were allowed to be made from wood, but the *keruvim* could be made only from gold (*Mekhilta* to Shemot 20:20). Rav Meir Shapiro quipped that this *halakha* reflects the necessity for financial investment in Torah education for children, and that no compromises should ever be made in order to cut costs.

 More recently, the Tolna Rebbe found it significant that the entire *kaporet* was made from a “*miksha*” – a single block of gold (25:18). The *keruvim* could not be formed and then attached to a sheet of gold to produce the *kaporet*. Rather, the artisans needed to chisel a block of gold to form the images of the two *keruvim*. The Rebbe suggested that this process might be symbolic of the essence of education, and its overarching purpose. The objective is to help the youngster reveal his inner talents and potential, so he or she can then work to maximize them. The educator should not endeavor to make the student into a desired mold, but rather to help the student find his or her inner strengths which the student then develops. Just as the artisans who produced the ark did not actually create the *keruvim*, but rather chiseled a gold block until the *keruvim* appeared, similarly, a successful educator does not strive to actually “build” the students, but rather to help the students build themselves, to show them who they really are, so they can then strive to bring out the very best of their inner selves and achieve to the best of their ability.

Tuesday

 The *menorah* in the *Mishkan* (and later in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*) is described in Parashat Teruma (25:31-39) as having been made from pure gold, and as featuring certain decorative features – specifically, several combinations of “cups, balls and flowers” that adorned the *menorah*. The Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (28a) comments that these decorations were required only if the *menorah* was made from gold, as is optimally required. When the nation lacks the financial wherewithal to make a golden *menorah* (as occurred after the victory of the Hasmoneans during the Second Temple period – Rosh Hashanah 24b), the *menorah* could be produced from other materials, and such a *menorah* does not require the aforementioned decorative features.

 Rav Meir Yona Barantzky, in his *Har Ha-moriya* commentary to the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira 3:20), raises the question of whether a golden *menorah* made without these decorations is valid for use. Although it is clear that they are required by Torah law, it is not clear whether a *menorah* made without them is invalid for the lighting in the *Mikdash*. Intuitively, we might assume that a golden *menorah* without these decorations should be no worse than a copper *menorah* made without these decorations, which certainly may be used.

 Rav Barantzky draws our attention to an interesting discussion among the halakhic authorities surrounding the prohibition against constructing structures resembling the Temple and its furnishings. As the Gemara (there in Rosh Hashanah and other contexts) discusses, the Torah forbids making for oneself a replica of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* or of one of the furnishings of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. In presenting this law, the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Yoreh Dei’a* 141:8) writes that it is forbidden to construct a *menorah* resembling the *menorah* in the *Mikdash* even out of materials other than gold, and even if it does not have the “cups, balls and flowers.” As the *Shakh* explains, such *menorahs* are valid for use in the Temple, and they therefore may not be made outside the Temple. However, the relationship between these two rulings in the *Shulchan Arukh* is unclear. Meaning, when the *Shulchan Arukh* writes that one may not make a *menorah* from a material other than gold, and that one may not make a *menorah* without the decorations, is this one statement – that a *menorah* from other materials may not be made regardless of whether it has decorations? Or, are these two independent statements: one may not make a *menorah* even from materials other than gold, and one may not make a *menorah* even without the decorative “cups, balls and flowers”? According to the first reading, the assumption is that a gold *menorah* without the decorations is invalid for use in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and thus it is permissible to make outside the *Mikdash* a golden *menorah* without the decorations. According to the second reading, however, a *menorah* without decorations may be used in the Temple even if it is made from gold, despite its optimally requiring these decorations, and thus even a golden *menorah* may be made outside the Temple if the decorations are not included. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his commentary, writes that a golden *menorah* without the decorations may not be used in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and is thus permissible to be produced outside the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, though he cites others who disagree.

 Rav Menachem Kasher, in *Torah Sheleima* (Shemot, chapter 25, note 197), notes the comments of the Ramban (to Shemot 25:39) which appear to reflect this view – that a golden *menorah* without these decorations is invalid for use. The Ramban cites a passage from *Berayta Di-memlekhet Ha-Mishkan*) stating that although the entire *menorah* needed to be made from a single block of gold (“*miksha*”), it was permissible to form the “cups, balls and flowers” separately and then attach them to the *menorah*. The passage cited by the Ramban appears, at first glance, to explain this *halakha* based on the fact that these decorations in any event are not indispensable to the *menorah*’s validity. However, the Ramban explained the passage differently, writing that these decorations are not required when the *menorah* is made from other materials, besides gold, and they are therefore treated as separate from the actual *menorah*, and may be made separately when they are required. The Ramban’s formulation clearly demonstrates his refusal to accept the validity of a gold *menorah* that does not have these decorative features.

Wednesday

 In describing the gold-plated ark which was placed in the inner chamber of the *Mishkan*, the Torah commands affixing golden rings to the ark through which the transport poles would be inserted: “You shall cast four golden rings, and place [them] on its four corners; and two rings [shall be placed] on one side, and two rings on the other side” (25:12). Rashi explains this verse to mean that the ark had four rings on its four edges, near the top, and the transport poles were inserted through the rings along the width of the ark on both sides. According to Rashi, the phrase “and two rings on one side, and two rings on the other side” is added to explain the previous phrase, which introduces the requirement to produce four rings. It clarifies that two of these four rings should be placed on one side, and two on the other.

 Several later commentators disagreed with Rashi’s reading, noting that the verse seems to imply that they were actually eight rings, and not just four. The verse begins by commanding that four rings be affixed to the four corners of the ark, and then adds, “**and** two rings on one side, and two rings on the other side.” The conjunctive “and” (“***u-****shtei*”) in this verse suggests that the Torah speaks of four additional rings, besides the four that were already mentioned.

 We find three different versions of this view, that eight rings were affixed to the ark.

 Tosefot in Masekhet Yoma (72a) suggest that eight rings were needed because there were two sets of poles. Two poles were permanently affixed alongside the ark through four rings, and were never removed from those rings. These are the poles of which the Torah speaks here in Parashat Teruma, where it commands, “The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it” (25:15). Later, in Sefer Bamidbar (4:6), the Torah presents the instructions for how the *kohanim* would prepare the *aron* for transport, and commands that “they shall place its poles.” According to Tosefot, this command refers to the second set of poles, which were placed alongside the ark only when the nation journeyed, and were used by the *Leviyim* who transported the ark. This is in contrast to the first set of poles, which permanently remained in place alongside the ark and served no practical function.

 Ibn Ezra (*Peirush Ha-arokh*) claimed that four of the ark’s eight rings were purely decorative. Whereas Tosefot maintained that the eight rings were used for two sets of poles, Ibn Ezra writes that there was only a single set of poles – as we would have intuitively assumed – but the Torah commanded affixing an additional four rings along the bottom of the ark for decoration.

 A third opinion is presented by Chizkuni, Rabbenu Yosef Bekhor Shor, and others. In their view, the four rings used for the two poles were not affixed directly onto the corners of the ark, but were rather interlocked with other rings which were attached directly to the ark. In order words, there were four rings attached to the surface of the ark, at its corners, and each of those rings had a ring interlocking with it. The four outer rings were the rings used for the transport poles, such that when the *Leviyim* carried the ark by holding the poles on their shoulders, the ark drooped somewhat, since the rings through which the poles ran were not directly attached to the ark.

Thursday

 Yesterday, we noted the theory proposed by Tosefot in Masekhet Yoma (72a) that two sets of poles were constructed and placed alongside the *aron* (ark). Whereas the conventional understanding is that there was one pole on either side of the ark, with which the *Leviyim* transported it through the wilderness, Tosefot raise the possibility that there were in fact two poles on either side. Of course, this theory gives rise to the question of why two sets of poles were necessary.

 A novel, clever suggestion to explain this position is offered by Rav Aryeh Zilber, in his work *Az Yashir* (Parashat Teruma), where he notes the controversy surrounding the location of the poles. Rashi (25:12) writes that the transport poles were affixed near the top of the ark, as stated explicitly by the Gemara in Masekhet Shabbat (92), which comments that the poles were situated one-third the way down the ark, a position which made transporting the ark the most comfortable. The Ramban, however, disagreed, arguing that it would be disrespectful for the majority of the ark to be underneath the *Leviyim* who carried it. According to the Ramban, the poles were affixed towards the bottom of the *aron*, such that the *aron* was elevated above the *Leviyim* during transport. A number of writers noted, however, that it would have been exceedingly difficult to carry the ark in this manner, as the weight of the entire *aron* would be essentially resting on the *Leviyim*’s shoulders.

 Rav Zilber suggested that Tosefot’s comments in Masekhet Yoma allow for the possibility of accepting both views, and suggesting that there were two sets of poles: one near the top of the ark, and one along the bottom.

 To explain why two sets of poles were needed, Rav Zilber draws our attention to the comments of the Tosafists elsewhere, in *Da’at Zekeinim* to Parashat Teruma (25:11), where they address the question of why God commanded constructing the ark from wood. Instead of making a wooden ark plated with gold, it would have, seemingly, been more appropriate for this sacred article to have been made entirely from gold. The Tosafists answer that a structure of this size made entirely from metal would have been too heavy carry. However, the Tosafists proceed to cite the Gemara’s famous comment in Masekhet Sota (35a) that the ark transported itself, supernaturally, and the *Leviyim* did not actually support its weight. This appears to undermine the Tosafists’ answer, as the *aron* could have been entirely gold, since the *Leviyim* in any event did not need to actually lift the ark. The Tosafists refute this challenge by claiming that this miracle was performed only on occasion, and not whenever the ark was transported. Although there were times when the ark traveled miraculously, at other times it needed to be physically carried by the *Leviyim*. Therefore, it could not have been made completely from gold.

 If so, Rav Zilber suggests, then we can explain the need for two sets of poles alongside the ark. When the ark transported itself, in miraculous fashion, and the *Leviyim* only appeared to be carrying it, then they held the lower poles, such that the ark was displayed in a respectful, prominent manner above their shoulders, and in any event they were not actually carrying it. However, when the ark had to be actually supported by the *Leviyim*, they needed to carry it with the upper poles, even though this was less respectful, as most of the ark was situated underneath them.

Friday

**In honor of my daughter, Devorah, upon her becoming a bat-mitzva today.**

**May the special joy of Adar remain with you throughout your life, until 120, amen.**

The opening Mishna of Masekhet Shekalim teaches that in the times of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, announcements were made starting on the first of Adar instructing people to send the mandatory annual *machatzit ha-shekel* tax to the Temple. The new funds needed to be collected by the first of the next month, Nissan, when the public sacrifices were to be purchased with the new revenue, and thus on Rosh Chodesh Adar people would begin sending in their donations.

 The Gemara in Masekhet Megila (13b) finds a connection between this *mitzva*, which was observed during the month of Adar, and the Purim story, which of course took place in this month: “God knew that Haman would take *shekalim* through Israel; therefore, He made their *shekalim* precede [Haman’s].” This refers to Haman’s request that the king authorize the extermination of the kingdom’s Jews, which would result in their property – a total of “ten thousand talents of silver” (Ester 3:9) – being brought into the royal treasury. Achashveirosh consented, and even allowed Haman to keep this enormous fortune. The Gemara comments that the *mitzva* of *machatzit ha-shekel* “preceded” Haman’s plot, and thus enabled the Jews to escape. In other words, the Gemara appears to view this specific *mitzva* as the source of merit through which the Jews were saved from Haman.

 What might be the connection between the *machatzit ha-shekel* obligation and the Purim miracle?

 The *machatzit ha-shekel* donation essentially established a link between each member of *Am Yisrael* and the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Wherever a person was and whatever he was involved with, he was linked to the *Mikdash* through his contribution, as the offerings brought in the Temple represented him as part of the Jewish Nation. Symbolically, then, the *mitzva* of *machatzit ha-shekel* might signify the connection each and every Jew has to God, regardless of where he is, not just geographically, but spiritually. Just as the small half-coin binds every person to the sanctity of the *Mikdash*, similarly, the “half-*shekel*” contributions that every person makes, the imperfect but not at all insignificant *mitzvot* which he performs, binds him to the Almighty. Although we are all just a “half,” and are all far from perfect, nevertheless, we must acknowledge, appreciate and rejoice over our connection to the “*Beit Ha-mikdash*,” to the Almighty. Despite our failures, our mistakes, our flaws, our imperfections, our deficiencies and our faults, we are still linked to God through the “half-*shekel*” that we have given, our modest but still meaningful achievements.

 If, indeed, this is the theme – or one of the themes – of the *machatzit ha-shekel*, then we can perhaps understand the connection drawn by the Gemara between this *mitzva* and the Purim story. As the Gemara famously comments (Megilla 13a), the Jews of Shushan participated in Achashveirosh’s feast – likely reflecting their integration in the decadent Persian society. The Gemara earlier (11b) tells that the utensils of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, which were looted at the time of the fall of Jerusalem, were used during this feast, and that Achashveirosh donned the priestly garments (12a). This likely refers to the Jews’ perception of their condition in Persia, that in their minds, the *Beit Ha-mikdash* had been replaced by Achashveriosh’s palace, and that he had replaced the *kohen gadol*. The sanctity and spirituality of Jerusalem had given way to the indulgence and debauchery of Shushan. But the threat posed by Haman, and the miracle through which the Jews were saved, reminded them of their everlasting, unshakeable bond to the “*Beit Ha-mikdash*,” to Torah, to their tradition, and to the Almighty. They were shown that even as they found themselves submerged in Persian society, they nevertheless had a “*machatzit ha-shekel*,” a small element of sanctity within them that continued to sustain their connection to God. And thus, as the Gemara teaches in Masekhet Shabbat (88a), the Purim miracle inspired the Jews to reaffirm their commitment to the Torah. They recognized that their cultural distance from the Torah’s ideal did not absolve them of the obligation to do what they can, to achieve to the best of their ability under their circumstances. They understood that the Torah remained relevant and binding even in Shushan, and despite their having veered very far from the spiritual standards to which the Torah wants us to aspire. Even in Shushan, they were linked to the sanctity of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. This link is what saved them from Haman’s edict, and is what underlies the festive Purim celebration.

 The special joy of Purim is the joy of the *machatzit ha-shekel* – of recognizing and celebrating the “half” that we get right, all the goodness within us. And it is for this reason, perhaps, that Kabbalistic tradition associates Purim with the diametrically opposite observance on the Jewish calendar – the Yom Kippur fast. On Yom Kippur, we focus our attention on the “missing half,” on all that we are capable of achieving but have failed to achieve. We reflect upon the mistakes we have made which could and should have been avoided, and all the failures which could have been successes. We cry, repent, and resolve to make a sincere effort to improve. The mirror image of Yom Kippur is Purim, the day when we celebrate our *machatzit ha-shekel* – the “half” that we can and must be proud of, all that we have achieved which maintains our connection to God. We indulge in feasting and merrymaking to demonstrate that even in “Shushan,” when we find ourselves distant from the spiritual ideal, we are nevertheless unshakably bound to Torah and to the Almighty.

 “*Mi-she’nikhnas Adar marbim be-simcha*” – “When Adar comes, we increase our joy.” This month, the month of the *machatzit ha-shekel* and the Purim miracle, is the time to celebrate who we are and what we’ve achieved, to take pride and exult in all that is good about us and our nation, and to rejoice over our special, eternal and unbreakable relationship with our Creator.

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