

PEKUDEI (EXODUS 38:21-40:38)

PARSHAS HACHODESH (Exodus, 12:1-20)" You have to PRAY Attention!

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

PARSHAS HACHODESH

This Shabbos will be a very busy one in the synagogues of the world. As is done every regular Saturday, we will read the weekly Torah Portion. (Actually, Torah Portions – this week is one of those times in the year when the calendar requires us to combine two portions into one. – See “Simchas Torah – Ahead to the Past and Back to the Future”) Then we will continue preparing ourselves for Passover by reading the Torah Portion that announces the advent of the Month of Nissan, the first month of the Jewish year. (See “Nissan Maximum” and “Double Dating”.)

The final Portion of the Book of Exodus opens with a detailed inventory of collections for the Tabernacle. The total of contributed gold was 29 talents, 730 shekels. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in his translation, Living Torah, explains that since a talent is three thousand shekels, the total came to 87,730 shekels, or 4386.5 pounds of gold.) They also collected 100 talents, 1775 shekels (15,088.75 pounds) of silver, and 70 talents, 2400 shekels (10,620 pounds) of copper.

The reason for the detailed accounting, according to the Midrash, is that Moses wanted to avoid any appearance of impropriety. He wanted to make sure no one could accuse him of "skimming off the top." He therefore provided a meticulous accounting of every penny.

IF YOU PUT ON TEFILLIN WHILE THINKING ABOUT TREES FALLING IN THE FOREST WHERE NO ONE CAN HEAR THEM FALL, DID YOU PUT ON TEFILLIN???

There is a phrase that is repeated numerous times in this week's Portion: "... as G-d had commanded Moses." After every description of the various components in the Tabernacle, the Torah tells us that it was as G-d had commanded Moses. The special clothes for the High Priest were made *as G-d had commanded Moses*. (Exodus, 39:2) The manufacture of the High Priest's Ephod, or apron, was *as G-d had commanded Moses*. (Ibid. verse 5) The Breastplate (verse 21), the robe (verse 27), the head-plate

(verse 32), and the clothes of all the priests (verse 29) were each *as G-d had commanded Moses*. The Torah goes on to describe many of the different building materials and furnishings of the Tabernacle, and tells us that each one was as G-d had commanded Moses.

What is the Torah telling us? We have been reading for weeks about the Tabernacle and the clothing for the Priests. G-d commanded, Moses collected, and the Israelites donated the materials. Why does the Torah continue to emphasize that what they did was as G-d had commanded Moses? How else would they do it? Wasn't it obvious?

There is a difference of opinion in the Talmud as to whether "Mitzvahs require intent." Is it sufficient to put on Tefillin or enter a Sukkah without thinking about what you're doing and why you're doing it? Or is one required to have specific intent to fulfill the Mitzvah?

One could argue: "I'm not supposed to eat pork, and I don't. G-d wants me to sit in the Sukkah on Sukkos, and I do. What difference does it make what I'm thinking about at the time?!"

The Talmud concludes that Mitzvahs DO require intent. If someone wrops Tefillin around my arm and places it on my head while I am sleeping, and then removes them before I wake up, I need to put them on again.

When we perform a Mitzvah, we typically recite a blessing, thanking G-d ... Who Sanctified us with His Mitzvahs, and commanded us to..."

We do not fulfill the Commandments of the Torah because we enjoy them. (Although hopefully we do.) We do not fulfill the Commandments of the Torah because it makes us feel more Jewish (Although hopefully we do.) We fulfill the Commandments of the Torah because we believe that that is what G-d wants us to do!!!

Every act of building and supplying the Tabernacle had to be done with the conscious effort to fulfill G-d's commandments. There is more to fulfilling Mitzvahs than just going through the motions. We should not act like robots, mindlessly moving our bodies based upon an earlier programming. A Torah way of life requires one to recognize that there is a Creator who requires us to follow His ways. We should maintain the awareness that He is in charge, and expects us to live our lives as G-d had commanded Moses.

Mitzvah fulfillment that is not CONSCIOUSLY as G-d had commanded Moses is very difficult to maintain long term. Many Jews from shtetels in Europe were very observant of Shabbos and Kashrus as they were growing up. But in many situations, that observance was a rote, uneducated habit that quickly fell away due to the challenges of living in a secular America.

A religion that is carried out as an unthinking force of habit is no religion at all.

I have a friend who started out non-observant. He dated a young lady who was somewhat "religious." During one of their dates at McDonald's, she ate her (non-Kosher) hamburger without the bun because it was Passover!! After they got married, he saw her lighting candles on Friday and asked why. She didn't know. He said to her, "If you're going to do something, you should at least know why!"

That challenge led the two of them to study and eventually commit themselves to a Torah lifestyle. They have dedicated their careers to Torah education, and raised their children to a life of Torah-true Judaism.

Every family has its own private jokes. One of ours is "Delicious Soup."

A few months after I got married, I learned a lesson about putting my foot in my mouth. I walked into the kitchen where my wife was preparing a meal. The newlywed bride wanted to know what her husband thought of what she was cooking. I absent-mindedly leaned over the pot, took a sniff, and exclaimed a safe, non-committal, "smells like delicious soup!"

She looked at me, and burst out laughing. The "soup" was, in reality, a pot of meatballs! I hadn't been paying attention, and she knew it! I sniffed without paying attention, and spoke without paying attention. The compliment I had paid her was, at best, worthless.

If I wake up in the morning, and automatically mumble, "*Modeh Ani -- I thank You, living and everlasting King, for generously returning my soul to me...*" without paying attention to what I am saying, DID I THANK HIM AT ALL?!

G-d has given us a wonderful world and a wonderful Torah. The least we can do is pay attention.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz