

Terumah

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The Torah says towards the end of last week's *parsha* that Moshe told the Jewish people "*all the words of God and all the judgments,*" (*Shemos 24:3*). The Jewish people answered back in unison, "*All that God has said we will do!*"

Then the Torah goes on a few more verses and says:

"And Moshe wrote all the words of God, and he arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve monuments for the twelve tribes of the Jewish people. He sent the youths of the Children of Israel, and they offered up burnt offerings, and they slaughtered peace offerings to God, bulls. And Moshe took half the blood and put it into the basins, and half the blood he cast onto the altar. And he took the Sefer HaBris—Book of the Covenant—and read it within the hearing of the people. . ." (*Shemos 24:4-7*)

This time however their response was, "*All that God spoke we will do and we will understand.*" Not only did they commit themselves to do everything commanded of them, but they added their commitment to also understand what they were expected to do. Why the change, and when did it occur?

To begin with, they had not long ago been slaves to Pharaoh and *Mitzrayim*. A "good" slave does what they are told, regardless of what they understand about it. Half the time what they were commanded to do didn't even make sense, but they had to do it anyhow. Does a slave master care what a slave relates to as long as their every demand is done?

We knew by that time that we had not been freed from Egyptian bondage to go anywhere we wanted or, to do anything we felt like doing. We were taken from Egyptian servitude to become servants of God Who at least knew what He was doing and was out for our good, not His own. So, like good servants, we pledged loyalty to

His word.

But it turned out that God wanted more from us than obedience. He also wanted us to buy into what He commanded us, and that means understanding, to the best of one's ability, why *mitzvos* are for our own good. We learned that God expected us to open up each *mitzvah* and look at its "heart," so that it would go into our hearts and inspire us to do great things with Him.

After all, we weren't only cleaning streets or building cities anymore. That doesn't necessitate the heart and soul of a person. As of Mt. Sinai, we had graduated to something far more profound, something that did require the best of us, for the world's good and ours as well.

Shabbos Day

BUT BEFORE GETTING to that, what changed in a couple of verses to change the Jewish people's understanding of God's expectations? One word: *Bris*. It had begun with Avraham and was renewed in their time. *Sefer HaBris*, which was the Torah from *Bereishis* up until the giving of Torah, was called that because that is what it contained, the *Bris Ben HaBesarim* that kicked off the eternal relationship between God and the Jewish people.

It's like someone telling you to do something for them that you assume does not require much thought or understanding. But after they tell you all the things to look out for and to be careful of, you start to pay more attention and maybe even ask a few questions to make sure you know what you're doing. You might even feel compelled to ask if such carefulness is required to perform what you had considered to be a simple task.

Sefer HaBris was the big picture they didn't have. It was all the important parts of history until that time, as if everything that had been done and accomplished was just to get that moment. It revealed to the Jewish people how lowly slaves could become the entire point of all of Creation, how their very acceptance of Torah was the reason for all of it to continue.

All of a sudden, their suffering made sense. All of a sudden, they had a much greater sense of importance and purpose. It was like Yosef *HaTzaddik* finding himself in an Egyptian jail one moment, and then thrust before the king of Egypt the next moment, while his stock shot up through the roof. Only this time it wasn't just Pharaoh whom the Jewish people stood before, but the Master of the Universe Himself!

Suddenly, the Jewish people found themselves needing to better understand their new role in history, and how best to manage it. Avoiding punishment was no longer sufficient motivation to do the job, a job that, unlike in Egypt, was for their own good. . . for their own benefit.

It was about relationship now, and every relationship is built upon understanding. The more profound the relationship and loyalty, the more understanding is needed.

Seudas Shlishis

THIS IS WHY the *mitzvah* that follows in this week's *parsha* is *terumas haleiv*—gift offerings of the heart. And not just any gift offering, but specifically those that will be used in the service of the *Mishkan*. This was like a father turning to his son and apprentice and saying, “You build this one. I want to see how well I have given over to you what is important to me.”

What is really being tested is the son's heart. A person can know how to do the most complicated tasks in life, but if their heart isn't in it, they'll underachieve. On the other hand, if a person knows a lot less, but has a heart devoted to success, they will find a way to succeed and even exceed expectations. Inspiration isn't everything, but it almost is, and it just doesn't exist if understanding doesn't as well.

Does that mean that we can be excused for not serving God with heart, or at all, when we don't understand why we should? Yes, if you can prove how there was no way to get enough understanding to find that inspiration. But that is unlikely, possible, but unlikely. It is not called “no way to get enough understanding” if the person themselves was their greatest obstacle. We can be sure that God is always ready to fulfill His part of the *Bris* if we are.

The *mitzvah* to build the *Mishkan* also served to make another point: all that we do is really for our own sake. As *Chazal* explain, when God says, “*So I can dwell within you,*” He meant within every Jew themselves. God was actually telling the Jewish people, “Bring what is necessary to transform yourselves from simple individuals into something I can dwell within.”

For whose benefit? Not for God's. God's already in everything. For our benefit, meaning that He will dwell within us in a way that we can sense His Presence within us and, recognize the improvement to our lives. It's God saying, “Give Me your heart, and I will fill it with My Presence.” Because no one wants to move in where they are not welcome and, an understanding heart is a welcoming heart.

Vayechulu: Getting More From Friday Night Kiddush:

Introduction, Part 1

THE CLIMAX OF my week is on Friday night while standing with *kos* and wine in hand, ready to make *Kiddush*. For me, it feels as if everything that occurred the entire previous week since *Havdalab* last week was to get to this point, and I am totally there.

Everyone knows to be quiet and listen. They know that *Kiddush* is not a mechanical act for me, not just a gateway to the rest of the meal I know they can't wait to start. But they are patient. They are used to my taking my time over each word, trying to focus on who knows what, assuming that I must be thinking something *kabbalistic* as I put heart and soul into what I am doing.

I am certainly trying to. But the truth is, despite all of this, I always feel as if something is missing, at least with respect to the first paragraph, beginning with *vayechulu*:

Heaven and the earth were completed—vayechulu—and all their host. And God completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did. And God blessed the seventh day and He sanctified it, for He abstained from all His work on it that God created to do. (Bereishis 2:1-3)

It might just be me, but I feel like fireworks should go off inside of me as I say each word. We're recalling how God made *all* of Creation, and that should be phenomenally mind blowing each time!

I mean, when I look at drawings of the Milky Way Galaxy among billions of others, I lose my breath. The vastness and intricacies of it all is just too overwhelming for me so that I have to stop looking. Just the fact that our own sun is "just right" from 93,000,000 miles away is just too hard to take for granted.

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Good *Shabbos*,
Pinchas Winston