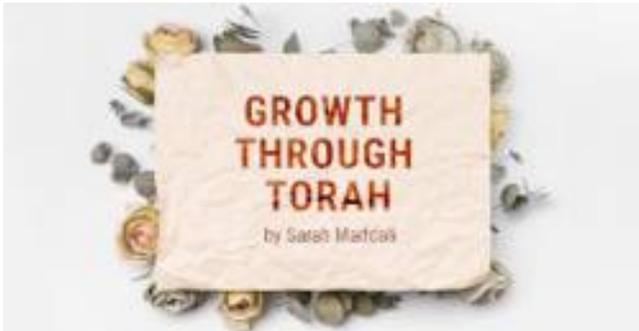


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Success Is In Trying

This week's Torah portion lists the 13 materials that Jews were asked to contribute towards the building of the *Mishkan*, the traveling tabernacle that the Jews built in the desert. The *Shoham* stones were one of the most valuable and expensive materials donated, is listed second to last. While the Jews personally carried and monetarily donated the other materials, the Torah states that the *Shoham* stones were carried by the clouds. Wouldn't this miraculous ordeal make the

Shoham even more worthy of being listed first as opposed to the end?

Lesson:

When it comes to physical endeavors, the reward is not always proportional to the amount of effort invested. Lottery winners put in minimal effort yet reap grand rewards, and some people work hard day in and out yet still struggle to make ends meet. But spiritual pursuits don't work in the same fashion. The Mishnah (Avot 5:23) says that for these types of endeavors, the reward is proportional to the effort. Whether we succeed or not is completely up to God, yet the amount of toil that we invest is completely up to us. Therefore, the effort and exertion is what our reward is based on.

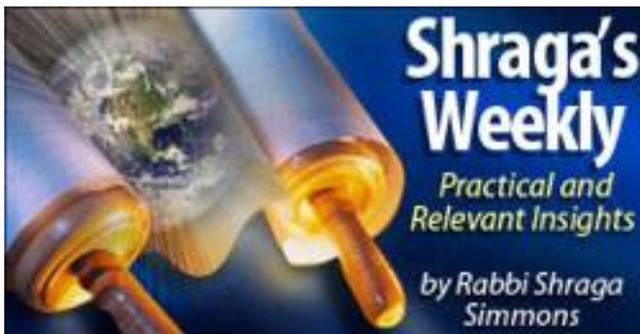
This is one explanation as to why the *Shoham* stones were listed towards the end. Even though this material was comparably more valuable, the amount of effort the Jews put in towards these stones was far less. Therefore, the materials used where the Jews invested effort were considered far more valued.

This is a comforting lesson as we know that if we put in the effort and try, regardless of the outcome, we have succeeded and will be rewarded proportionally. This idea is further reflected in the *parsha* when God commands Moses to build a menorah (25:31). A famous Torah commentary, the *Midrash Tanchuma*, explains that it was so complicated that Moses could not visualize God's instruction. So God showed him an image of what the menorah should look like. Even this wasn't enough to help Moses

construct the menorah, so in the end God instructed Moses to throw the ingot into the fire and the completed menorah materialized.

Does this mean that Moses failed his mission to build the menorah? Of course not! Our mission in life is not to succeed since success is determined solely by God; our mission is only to try and put in our best effort.

Exercise: Go out of your comfort zone and stretch yourself to perform a mitzvah that is difficult for you. This could be giving a little extra *tzadakah*, charity, sharing your special, homemade cookies, wearing something not as appealing but more modest, or giving up your free afternoon to help someone in need. Have in mind that your reward for this mitzvah is proportional to the extra effort you applied.



Holy Inside and Out

This week's Parsha is the dream of every Jewish architect and interior designer. It describes the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Temple that traveled with the Jewish People during their 40 years in the desert (and for 500 years after), until finding its permanent home in Jerusalem.

At the center of the Mishkan was the Holy Ark which contained the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. This Ark was a square box made of wood. The Torah explains (Exodus 25:11): *"You shall cover the wood with pure gold from the inside and from the outside."*

The need to cover the outside of the Ark with gold is understandable: The centerpiece of the Mishkan should certainly be majestic and regal. But what need is there to cover the wood on the inside of the box as well?

The Talmud (Yoma 72b) explains: A person's outward appearance must be an accurate reflection of their insides as well. In other words, don't be a hypocrite.

We all know someone who is a fake - quick with a smile, yet ready to stab you in the back just the same. Sadly, part of getting by in life is the ability to discern the genuine from the fake. (Children happen to be particularly adept at this.) Maybe that's what King Solomon meant when he said, *"Better the anger of a friend than the kiss of an enemy."* At least you know what you're getting.

One of the wonders of Judaism is how the Hebrew language reveals truths about everyday life. The Hebrew word for face - *"paneem,"* is nearly identical to the Hebrew word for interior - *"pineem."* This teaches that the face we present must reflect our insides. (Contrast this with the English word "face," which shares its origins with "facade," meaning a deceptive appearance.)

This aversion to hypocrisy is reflected in the laws of kashrut as well. The one Jewish law that everyone in the world seems to know is that a Jew

is not allowed to eat ham, pork or anything else derived from a pig. Interestingly, there is nothing in the Torah that seems to make this prohibition more stringent than eating, for example, catfish or a chocolate-covered ant. Why then have we singled out this prohibition against the pig?

The Torah tells us (and zoologists concur) that the pig is the only animal in the world possessing the outward symbol of kosher (split hooves), but not the inward symbol (chewing cud). The pig therefore represents that which is kosher in outward appearance, but is in fact unclean on the inside. This type of hypocrisy is described the Talmud as one of the categories of behavior that God detests. For that moral reason, the pig is universally viewed as reprehensible to the Jew.

Back to our Parsha... We're left with one glaring question: If the Ark is covered with gold both on the inside and the outside, then what need is there at all for the shell to be made out of wood?! Why not simply make the ark one solid piece of gold?

The answer is that attaining purity and sincerity does not necessarily happen overnight. Like any important goal, it is achieved through constant, steady growth. Wood - organic and dynamic - represents this idea.

Judaism is not all-or-nothing. Observance of Torah might begin with the lighting of Shabbos candles. Or it might mean studying the weekly Parsha, 15 minutes a day. (ArtScroll's Stone Chumash is particularly good for this.) Or it might mean reciting *Shema Yisrael* before going to bed.

Imagine stumbling across a gold mine. Would you turn down the gold because you know you won't find all the gold mines in the world? So too, every Mitzvah is a gold mine. Of course, we strive ultimately to fulfill them all. But even if we do just one, our lives are enriched forever.

The important thing is not where we are on the ladder, but rather in what direction we're headed, and how many rungs we've climbed. One tree does not compare its rings against another. Growth through Torah is the same way. Whatever effort you make to come close to the Almighty, whatever Torah you learn - the impact is cumulative. Perhaps that's why the Torah likens a person to a tree (see Deut. 20:19). Steady and constant, every drop counts.

The Talmud (Brachos 28a) says that in the Yeshiva of Rabban Gamliel, the prerequisite for admission was that a student's internal character had to match his outer appearance. Rabban Gamliel did not accept just anybody into the Yeshiva; he accepted only those who were honest, sincere and free of hypocrisy.

The Talmud continues: After Rabban Gamliel left his position as head of the Yeshiva, they instituted a new policy whereby any student - fitting or not - could be admitted. Hundreds of new students flocked to sign up. At which point, Rabban Gamliel became depressed and said, "Perhaps, God forbid, I have withheld Torah from the Jewish People!"

The Chiddushei HaRim (19th century Europe) asks: What was Rabban Gamliel saying? Of course he knew all along that his strict admission policy prevented some people from learning! So

why is he so surprised now and getting depressed?

The answer is that Rabban Gamliel saw that because all those new students spent time in the Yeshiva, they too became honest and sincere by virtue of having learned Torah. Torah has the power to transform a person from mediocre to great.

Some years ago, I was speaking privately with a great Torah scholar and I said to him: "Rabbi, I am so grateful for the opportunity I've had to learn Torah. Without it, I don't know where I'd be."

The rabbi looked at me and said, "Me, too."

At the beginning of this week's parsha, God commands the Jewish People to "*make Me a Mishkan, so that I may dwell within them*" (Exodus 25:8). The Talmud points out that the verse should have read, "Make Me a Mishkan, so that I may dwell within it." Why then the language of "*dwell within them*"?

Because, answer our Sages, the Torah is telling us that the goal of building the Mishkan is not merely to create a House for God, but to sanctify a place for Him within the people. Each individual Jew must personally strive to become a microcosm of the Mishkan: a living, breathing bastion of holiness.

Today, let us hope to find the strength and inspiration to build our very own Mishkan. And may its Ark be crafted of fine wood, laden with gold, both inside and out.



A Solution to Every Problem

Our Sages teach us that at Mount Sinai we attained such majestic heights that, if not for the sin of the Golden Calf, we would never have needed to build a Sanctuary. That being the case, it is rather puzzling that in this *parashah* we are commanded regarding the Sanctuary, although the sin of the Golden Calf had yet to occur. So why are we instructed to build the Sanctuary at this point?

Nothing in the Torah is random. The construction of the Tabernacle – which served to keep God close to His people – was commanded before the sin of the Golden Calf – which distanced Israel from God – is mentioned in the Torah. God teaches us a lesson to fortify us through all life's tests: Before a tragedy occurs, God provides the solution.

Our mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, often explains this teaching through a popular parable. At one time or another, through our own foolishness, or for some inexplicable reason, we find ourselves in "hot water" and feel we cannot continue. Under such circumstances, what's to be

done? We have three choices, which can be compared to a carrot, an egg, or coffee.

If a carrot is placed into boiling water, after a while it disintegrates and becomes mush. If an egg is placed into boiling water, it becomes hard and tough, but when coffee is placed into boiling water, the boiling water becomes a delicious drink. These are the choices that we all have when we suddenly find ourselves in boiling water. We can disintegrate like carrots, fall apart, and become depressed; we can become as hard as a boiled egg, tough, cynical, angry, and bitter; or we can become like coffee, converting that water into a delicious drink.

Similarly, we can transform our difficulties, our tragedies into something positive and find our way back to our Creator. God showed us the way: The Tabernacle that would bring atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf was commanded to be built before the sin of the Golden Calf occurred. Moses ascended Mount Sinai again, and beseeched God to forgive His people. Then he ascended once again to receive the Ten Commandments anew. The day the forgiveness was complete and Moses was given the Second Tablets became a Day of Atonement for all eternity – Yom Kippur.

These then, are our choices: In the face of onerous difficulty do we become “carrots,” depressed? Do we become “hard-boiled eggs,” tough and angry? Or do we convert that boiling water into something positive and create something desirable from our adversity? Learn from that experience! Move on, become wiser and more

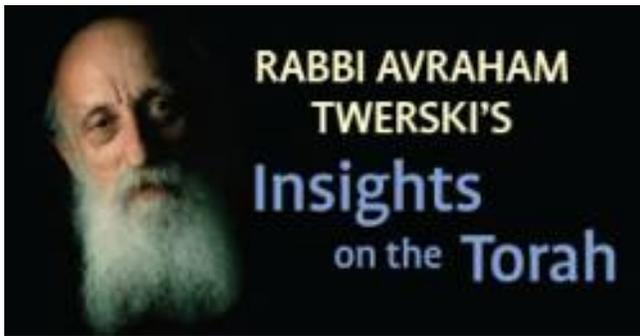
sensitive, and fulfill the purpose for which you were created by continuing to serve our Creator.

Kosher (Honest) Money

Parashas Terumah, which focuses on the building of the Sanctuary, follows the portion of *Mishpatim*, which, in great measure, deals with the laws of honesty and ethics. The obvious question is, “What is the connection between these two portions?”

The Torah is teaching us an important lesson. The money that we contribute must be “honest money.” We are never to rationalize or delude ourselves into believing that it’s acceptable to be dishonest or unethical in business as long as we contribute to good and just charitable causes.

This lesson is further reinforced by the Hebrew word *terumah*, which means “an uplifted portion.” If the letters of the word are rearranged, they spell, “*hamutar*,” meaning “the permissible.” Only money that is “kosher” – “honest money” – may be donated to *tzedakah*. Even as our goals must be honorable and noble, so, too, the means by which we achieve them must be permissible – untainted and free of corruption.



Make Your Best Effort, and God Completes the Task

You shall make a Menorah of pure gold, hammered out shall the Menorah be made, its base, its shaft, its cups, its knobs and its blossoms shall be [hammered] from it# (25:31)

Rashi calls our attention to the wording of this verse, which begins with “You shall make a Menorah,” but closes with “shall the Menorah be made.” The intricate elements of the Menorah were not to be made separately and then attached to it. Everything had to be hammered out from a single piece of gold.

Inasmuch as this was beyond human ability, God instructed Moses to put the gold ingots into the fire, and the Menorah emerged, fashioned by God.

This is an important lesson. We are obligated to do what is right and proper and demanded of us, but we are not always able to bring things to completion. But this does not give us permission to sit back and do nothing. We must do whatever is within our ability to do and trust in God for a favorable outcome.

This is a delicate balance which is often ignored. Some people insist on doing everything themselves, refusing to accept the limitations of reality. They become frustrated when they cannot control everything, even when clear thinking indicates that there are things beyond one's control. On the other hand, some people who realize that they cannot control the outcome may sit back and do nothing. “What's the use?” they say. “I cannot make things turn out the way I want anyway.”

The Menorah teaches us the proper balance. We must do what we can. When we have made a sincere effort, it is then that God will help us bring it to completion. “God will bless you in all that you do” (Deuteronomy 15:18).

The Baal Shem Tov uses this concept to explain a rather puzzling verse in Psalms. “Yours, O God, is kindness, for you repay each man according to his deeds” (Psalms 62:13). If God rewards a person only according to his deeds, that is simply justice. In what way is this a kindness?

The Baal Shem Tov says that a person only initiates the deed, but God brings it to completion, God rewards the person as if he had completed the entire deed himself. That is beyond what the person deserved, and that is a Divine kindness.

“You shall make” and “it shall be made.” The Menorah was a source of light. This lesson illuminates for us a proper path in life.

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