

## Torah Table Talk

**Building the Tabernacle , Building the World**  
 Parshat Pekudei/ Shabbat Shekalim/ Rosh Hodesh  
 Exodus, Chapter 33:21 – 40:38  
 Exodus 12:1 - 20



Parshat Pekudei is an accounting of all the materials that were used in the building of the Tabernacle. In an effort to be an honest public servant, Moses insists on providing a full record of all the materials that were collected for the building of the tabernacle so that there would be no question of misappropriated funds or resources. The Parshah concludes with a description of the completion of this project and the dramatic appearance of God in the Tabernacle. The building of the Tabernacle is as significant as the very creation of the universe.

This Shabbat we also take a two more Torah scrolls from the ark, one in honor of Shabbat Shekalim and the second for Rosh Hodesh, the new month of Adar Bet. Shabbat Shekalim is the first of the four special Sabbath which precede Passover. Celebrated on or immediately before the beginning of Adar, it is a reminder of the practice of having each male of drafting age pay a half shekel head tax each year. This money was used for the annual upkeep of the daily burnt offerings.

### **Exodus 39:32,**

*Thus was finished* all the work of the Tabernacle of the tent of meeting; and the children of Israel did so; just as the Lord commanded Moses, **so did they**....

### **Exodus 39:43**

When Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks – as the Lord had commanded - Moses blessed them

### **Exodus 40:33 – 34**

*When Moses finished the work*, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle

### **Genesis 1:31 – 2:3**

“And God saw all that He had made and found it very good.....The Heaven and the earth were finished and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing and He ceased in the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from the all the work of creating that He had done.”

### **Yalkut Shimoni:**

“Moses Saw – and Moses blessed them:” When a person who completes a big project it (his work) needs a blessing. The Holy One after He created the world, the angels blessed God’s world, and when Moses completed the Tabernacle blessed the work of the nation by saying “May the holy presence of God dwell in this tabernacle.” Why did Moses do this? Did not the Holy already promise, I will dwell among them?” He did so because he was afraid the possibly either he or Beza lel (the master craftsman) tried to improve on what God had commanded them to do.

### **Toldot Yitzhak, Rabbi Yitzhak Karo:**

From the first time Israel is commanded to build the tabernacle in Parshat Terumah until the end of the book of Exodus, the Hebrew verb “Asah - to make” 248 times, similar to the number of positive commandments in the Torah. (According to tradition there are 248 positive commandments – “Thou shalt”s -and 365 negative

commandments – “Thou shalt not”s.) Building the tabernacle was similar to fulfilling all the other commandments in the Torah, and that is why the divine presence dwelled in the tabernacle.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. How do the verses in Genesis quoted above and Exodus echo one another? What does this say about the Torah’s perception of the building of the Tabernacle? In what way were the Israelites building a new world by constructing the Tabernacle and creating a place of worship for themselves? How did this work help them overcome their past as slaves?
2. What is the difference between the Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle? What does each represent and how is it part of the Modern day synagogue?
3. Why do Moses and God need a blessing upon completing their building projects? What blessing does each one give? How does a blessing give one a sense of reassurance and purpose in the work that they do?

## **Half Shekel – a Symbol of Equality**

### **Exodus 30:12 – 15**

When you take a census of the Israelite people according to their enrollment, each shall pay the Lord a atonement for himself on being enrolled, that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled. This is what everyone that is enrolled shall pay: a half shekel by the sanctuary weight...Everyone who is entered in the record from age twenty years up shall give the Lord’s offering. The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than a half a shekel when giving the Lord’s offering as atonement for your person

### **Parparaot Latorah by Rabbi Menachem Becker**

The sages wonder why Moses commanded the Israelites to pay a half shekel and not a whole shekel as their yearly tax. This is how the Torah teaches us no person can become complete in isolation; rather when he joins himself to others he becomes a whole person. Also we do not know who the other person is with whom we will become a complete person: the simplest Jew may be the one who completes the greatest person in Israel.

### **Jerusalem Talmud Shekalim 2:3:**

Why were they commanded to bring a half shekel? Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah: One said, “Since Israel sinned by worshipping an idol when Moses was six hours late, so they must bring a half a shekel which six garmisin (a type of coin); the other said, since they worshipped the golden calf when Moses was a half a day late (according to the Midrash Moses was six hours late returning from Mount Sinai) so they must now pay an atonement offering of a half a shekel. Rabbi Nehemiah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai since they broke the Ten Commandments by worshipping an idol, they must give a half a shekel which is equal to ten gera (a measure of weight.)

### **The JPS Torah Commentary, Exodus by Nachum Sarna (Page195)**

This passage recognizes that census taking is a necessary administrative measure but regards it as fraught with danger to the public. The several such head counts in the bible are usually related to army service or warfare. In only one other instance is there any mention of payment of ransom money or ill consequences – the remarkable exception of the census of ordered by David, which resulted in a visitation of pestilence, as told in the book of Samuel.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the reasons that the people were only commanded to bring a half a Shekel as a head tax and not a full Shekel? What other reasons can think for this practice.
2. The Torah refers to the Half Shekel as a “Kofer,” as an atonement. What were the people atoning for? Look in other translations of the Torah to see how this word is translated? How else is it understood?
3. The Torah emphasizes that the rich shall not pay more nor shall the poor pay less. Why? How does the annual half shekel tax emphasize the inherent equality of all the Israelite people? What happens if a person could not afford to pay the half shekel tax?
4. We continue to express a reluctance to count people directly. At the daily Minyan it is customary to find some indirect means of counting people such as reciting a verse that has ten words in it (*hoshea et amecha*) Why is there such a reluctance to count people? Is this merely a superstition or the expression of some deeper idea? What do you think?

### ***How to use Torah Table Talk***

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind  
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***