

Vayakhel

Mirrors, Unity, Hope, and Compromise

This week we read the *Torah* portion *Vayakhel*. In this *Torah* portion we learn about *Shabbos* and about the building of the Tabernacle, and we also learn about how the Jewish women donated their mirrors to the Tabernacle. Originally Moshe did not want to accept this gift because he thought those mirrors were just products of vanity, but G-d told him to accept this gift. From this gift the laver was made, the utensil which the *Kohanim* used to purify themselves. Today is also *Shabbos Shkolim*. On this day we take out two *Torahs* and from the second *Torah* we read the beginning of the *Torah* portion *Ki Sissa*. We learn how the Jewish people were to give half a shekel to the Temple. Based on these verses, we learn the Jewish people were to give half a shekel to the Temple yearly. This money was to be used for the sacrifices in the Temple for the coming year, beginning in the month of *Nisan*. Every Jew was to have a portion in these sacrifices. Any money left over from previous years was to be used to repair the Temple to keep it in tip-top shape. The reason why we read about giving the half *shekel* this particular time of year is because the money had to be given before the first of *Nisan* one month away. The Jewish people had the whole month of *Adar* to pay this half *shekel*. *Shabbos Shkolim* is always on or before the first day of *Adar*.

The Jewish people were commanded to give the half *shekels* now because starting from the first of *Nisan*, these half *shekels* would be used to prepare the community for the next year, and all the money that was left over from the previous year would be used to put the Temple and Jerusalem in perfect shape. More Jews come to the Temple on *Pesach* than on any other time. With such a huge crowd coming, all the necessary repairs had to be made so that Jerusalem and the Temple could handle this great mass of people.

The rabbis say that there were three principle reasons why the *shkolim* were given. The first reason the rabbis give was to teach us all that we need to be part of something greater than ourselves, that we need to be part of the Jewish people. As one we're only half a person, half a *shekel*. We give only a half *shekel* and not a whole *shekel* to teach us that a Jew is not a whole person until he has attached himself to his people. When his half

shekel is added to the half *shekels* of all the other Jews, then a whole new entity is created. The Jewish people in a certain sense is greater than the sum of all its parts and can offer the two daily sacrifices in the Temple, morning and evening, as a separate entity. Unity is necessary to raise the Jewish people to a level greater than each individual alone can attain.

The second reason that the rabbis give for giving half a *shekel* is that the Jewish women did not worship the golden calf. They did not need atonement for this sin. In fact, even in Egypt when the men were ready to give up, the women said they should not give up and made themselves attractive to the men so that the men would want to have children. The men had decided that it was not worthwhile having children any more, that there was no future for the Jewish people. So, because the women did not worship the golden calf, the women did not need the half a shekel for atonement. Only the men needed it because the men were the ones who sinned. And, since the Jewish people have always been organized in family units, only half the family sinned. Only the men sinned; therefore, only half a *shekel* had to be brought. The third reason the rabbis give for giving a half a *shekel* was because when the Jewish people sinned at the golden calf, they had a claim against G-d. They said, "G-d, why did You create within us a *Yetzer Hora*, the desire to do evil? If You would not have created the *Yetzer Hora*, we would never have done evil. Therefore, You are half responsible, G-d." So G-d said, "You're right," and He accepted that claim.

The rabbis teach that the events which happened in the *Torah* portion *Vayakhel* occurred the day after *Yom Kippur* when Moshe came down from Mt. Sinai informing the people that they had been forgiven from the sin of the golden calf. Moshe did these things the day he came down from Mt. Sinai. He gathered the people together, he told them that they were to build a Tabernacle, and the third thing he did was to sit down and judge the people.

There are three things that the Jewish people need in order not to repeat the sin of the golden calf. The first thing they need is unity. They have to feel that as a group they can handle their problems, that united, the Jewish people can overcome all obstacles. The second thing the Jewish people need is hope. The Tabernacle was a symbol of hope, a symbol that

G-d's presence was with them, that G-d would never let them down. They must never again panic like the men did with the golden calf when they thought that Moshe was not coming down from Mt. Sinai. "Where is Moshe?" they shouted. "How can we go into the land of Israel? We are not strong enough," and so forth. They panicked like they did in Egypt. Only the women didn't give up hope. They should have waited at least a few days to see if Moshe would come. Even today, we hear the same thing. People will say, "What's the alternative? What do you mean, what's the alternative? The alternative to just wait. Eventually something is going to happen that will make it better. You do not have to jump to a bad solutions because you haven't got an answer to the problem now. The men were willing to give up but the women said, "Wait, wait. G-d will take care of it." The men said, "Well, Moshe is not coming. We need a leader." The women said, "Wait, wait. Don't panic." The same thing happened when the spies came back with an evil report about the land of Israel. They said, "We cannot go into the land. What can we do? We have to turn around." The women said, "Wait, wait." Sometimes what we need is patience. Women, by and large, when they come to solve a problem are much more practical than men. Men want sweeping theoretical solutions. Women are usually more filled with faith and patience and hope. When Moshe came down from Mt. Sinai, he also reiterated the laws of *Shabbos*. On *Shabbos* we have to concentrate on our nurturing abilities. The *Shabbos* is to teach men to be more women-like. On *Shabbos* we should forget about business and our labors. We should look at what is really important, our children, our family. If we can't solve our problems now, we should just wait. We should do the best we can, until eventually a solution will come which will be the correct solution. That is what the women did in Egypt and in the desert. They did not give up, and that is why G-d told Moshe to accept their mirrors because it was they who gave hope to the Jewish people.

Finally, the last thing the Jewish people must do to prevent the sin of the golden calf is to realize that when we have disputes, we should be willing to compromise. When a person comes before a rabbi, he is asked by the rabbi, "Do you want the *Din*, the strict law, or do you want to compromise?" because the court is not supposed to judge in the first instance according to the *Din*, the strict law. It is supposed to judge according to

compromise. When you have a compromise, everybody wins and the litigants can remain friends. But if you judge according to the strict law, then there is a loser and a winner and hatred will ensue. In order for the Jewish people to maintain unification, they had to realize that there is in almost all cases right and wrong on both sides of the argument, and therefore, compromise is the best solution. This does not apply, though, to people who do not share our values. That's why we have the holiday of *Purim*. When people say they are going to kill you, you had better believe they are going to kill you. With them you cannot compromise.

In order for the Jewish people to survive, we must have unity, we must have hope, and we must also be willing to compromise our differences, also. We do not always have to come up with logical answers now. Many times we can wait. The women in Egypt and the desert taught us to have faith. Men often want a logical answer now. They want to understand everything, but you can drive a car without understanding how a car works. We can do most things in life without understanding how they work, and sometimes our understanding of how things work is faulty any way. Things may not work the way we think they work. Communism thought it had all the answers, but it didn't. The most important thing is to keep going, never to give up hope and to be willing to compromise differences within the Jewish people so that we stay united.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a doctor who was examining three patients for Alzheimer's. He went up to the first man and said, "How much is three times three?" The man said, "157." He went up to the second man and asked, "How much is three times three?" The man said, "Tuesday." Then he went to the third man and asked, "How much is three times three?" The man said, "Nine." The doctor said, "Oh, that is wonderful. How did you get it?" The man said, "Easy. I subtracted Tuesday from 157." In life, many times things are not logical. Therefore, we do not have to run to solutions that are not good. If we keep true to our pathway, going always with hope, staying united because we are willing to compromise our differences, then we can rest assured that the Jewish people will avoid the pitfalls of future golden calves and will always stay strong so the *Mashiach* will come quickly in our day. Amen.