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מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
 רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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 Chief Rabbi of Elad MORDECHAI MALKA, Israel Founder & President Institutions "or Hamelech"



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Pekudei

The Obligation to Act With Integrity

Expounding on the opening words of the *parashah*, "Eileh pekudei ha'mishkan, These are the accountings of the *Mishkan*," the Midrash Rabbah [51:1] states, "'Ish emunot rav berachot, A trustworthy man will increase blessings.' You find that Hashem brings blessing through anyone who is trustworthy. However, about one who is not trustworthy it states, 'but one who rushes to become wealthy will not be exonerated.'" The Midrash continues to state that Moshe, the treasurer of the *Mishkan*, was the paradigm of a trustworthy individual. Therefore all of the items in the *Mishkan* were blessed because of his trustworthiness.

Question:

The question begs to be asked: How could Moshe Rabbeinu have been required to submit a detailed record listing all of the Jewish people's donations towards the construction of the *Mishkan*? Could Moshe, about whom Hashem declares was incomparably honest [see *Bamidbar* 12:7], ever be suspected of dishonesty; so much so, that the Torah goes to great lengths to list all of the people's donations?

The World's Perspective

In our times, we have unfortunately been witness to elected, community leaders acting without integrity and with their own self-interests in mind. This stems from a lack of *emunah*, faith, thinking that they must take advantage of their present position to grow wealthy. They reason that if they fail to act now, they will not get another opportunity. However, if they were wise, they would realize that they will eventually be caught for their thievery. We have seen how such individuals get entrapped by their *yetzer hara* and are then apprehended, lowering their personal status and disgracing their families. Not only that, but they also cause a public *chilul Hashem*, for which only death can atone, as our Sages have taught. The prophet Yirmiyahu states about one who earns money dishonestly [17:11], "*Oseh osher ve'lo be'mishpat be'chatzi yamav yaazvenu u'beachrito yihiyeh naval*, One who earns wealth unjustly, in the middle of his days it will leave him, and he will be considered an unscrupulous degenerate." One must realize that this applies to every man in his own business endeavors or in managing the funds of a *beit ha'knesset*, for example. This must certainly be taken to heart in our generation, when there are those who, indeed, support Torah study, but do so through unscrupulous means. They justify their actions by reasoning that they are acting for the sake of the Torah and those who study it. But there is no greater error than this, to take pride in supporting the Torah through dishonest means, believing that they are "helping" Hashem support the Torah. They can be compared to a villager who saw a freight train pulling heavy wagons loaded with cargo. Driving slowly at first, the villager thought that he must help push the train. He therefore descended and began to push the train from behind. In his foolishness, he thought that he had succeeded in helping the train drive faster. So too, are those who seek to support the Torah through dishonest means. These people are weak in faith. Just like in the desert, it was the *Aron* [inside of which was the *luchot* and Torah] that actually carried those who appeared to be carrying it, and not vice versa, so too, now as well. Additionally, Torah study generated from these funds does not receive special Divine Assistance, because the end does not justify the means. This is not the way of the Torah; on the contrary, Torah leaders throughout the generations were always careful not to use money that was not entirely "pure" from any trace of dishonesty. The Torah study supported by these funds is a *mitzvah ha'baah be'aveirah*, a mitzvah that comes from sin, and there is no blessing on it. The same applies to man in his business ventures: Only the efforts of an honest individual will be blessed, as Rabbi stated in *Pirkei Avot* [2:1], "Which is the upright path that man should choose? That which is a credit to himself and will earn him admiration in the eyes of man."

Moshe Rabbeinu Taught Us About Integrity

The *parashah* therefore comes to teach us the manner in which Moshe Rabbeinu led the Jewish Nation. Moshe was Hashem's messenger who performed wondrous miracles, received the Torah on Har Sinai where Hashem



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spoke to him face to face as it were, and displayed self-sacrifice following the *cheit ha'eigel* to save the Jews from decimation. Furthermore, our Sages teach that after *kriyat Yam Suf*, the sea spewed the Egyptians and their wealth onto the shore. The Jews grew enormously wealthy, and the "poorest" among them owned ten donkeys laden with silver and gold. Yet in relation to Moshe Rabbeinu, our Sages apply the *pasuk* [Mishlei 10:8], "*Chacham lev yikach mitzvot*, The wise at heart takes mitzvot." He disregarded all of the riches and involved himself with the bones of Yosef, proving without a doubt that he did not covet money, only mitzvot. Yet despite this, the *parashah* opens with Moshe's records about where all of the contributions to the *Mishkan* were employed. This is to the extent that our Sages teach that when Moshe forgot to include the pillar hooks into the tally, he worried over how he would explain the apparent inaccuracy to the Jewish people. Only once Hashem hinted to him that the funds were utilized for the pillar hooks were Moshe's concerns assuaged. With this, we are being taught about the integrity that must be displayed by a public leader, for only by displaying this trait will he earn the trust of the people and receive Heavenly blessing, as noted by our Sages. There is therefore a custom in some congregations to recite a *mishabeirach*, a blessing for the congregation following the Torah reading. In this blessing is a special paragraph inserted for the communal leaders and its attendants. The text of the blessing is "*Ve'kol mi she'oskim be'tzarhei tzibbur be'emunah*, And all those who **faithfully** involve themselves with the community's needs." This is meant to exclude all those who do not serve the community with integrity, for these individuals are not deserving of blessing.

Story of the Maharit Algazi ז"ל

The Maharit Algazi [R' Yom Tov Algazi ז"ל], once served as a messenger to collect charity for the poor of Yerushalayim. To whichever city he went, he would first meet with the *rav* and then address the congregation. Upon arriving in the Jewish community of Frankfurt, he met with the *rav*, R' Pinchas Horowitz. He then addressed the congregation in the presence of the *rav* of Frankfurt, as well as other *gedolei Yisrael*, amongst them R' Natan Adler, and his student the Chatam Sofer. At the conclusion of his *derashah*, he requested the congregation's assistance, and they responded very generously. There was one Jew in particular though, who gave a very large amount – a sack filled with gold coins. When the Maharit Algazi departed, he was escorted by the *gedolei Yisrael*. The Maharit gave the sack of gold coins he had received to the Chatam Sofer and requested that he return it to the one who donated it. He explained that he sensed there was something forbidden mixed into the money, and it was therefore not befitting for such money to support Torah and *chesed*. The Chatam Sofer indeed returned the money and eventually discovered that the wealthy donor was a merchant who violated the prohibition of interest and usury. This teaches us that blessing does not rest on money that has any trace of sin, nor does it rest on the Torah that it supports.

Words of Mussar

From the above we learn to what degree an individual must act with integrity and honesty both in his business endeavors and, all the more so, in communal matters. For this is the secret to blessing and success, and only by acting in such a manner will the Divine Presence bless our endeavors. Acting in such a manner also serves to earn the trust of the people. I have unfortunately seen many disputes caused by a lack of integrity and by not learning from Moshe Rabbeinu's lesson. If a *gabbai* of the *beit ha'knesset* would submit a record detailing how the congregation's funds were utilized, it would benefit him as well as the congregation. In addition, those who support Torah study should try to ensure that everything is done scrupulously, for only by doing so, will blessing rest on the Torah study supported by these funds. Ultimately, the end does not justify the means, and this should be considered and taken to heart.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka