



57

### LEVELS OF COMMITMENT

**O**NE WINDY MORNING A SHEET OF NEWSPAPER WAS BLOWING AROUND the farmyard. A chicken and a young calf stopped to look at it. The page showed an advert for a new restaurant which had opened in the nearby market town (kosher, of course). There were colour pictures of a variety of culinary delights, including “Beef Steak”, and “Spanish Omelette”. “Look,” said the chicken, “there we are, both of us!” The calf, who was quite mature for his age, looked scornfully at the chicken. “From you they just want a donation”, he responded. “From me they demand total commitment”.

How does this relate to the Torah readings this Shabbat? In fact two Torah Scrolls are used. In one we have the Sedra<sup>1</sup> of the week, giving the accounts of the donations of the entire Jewish people for the building of the Sanctuary, and describing how they were used. In the other<sup>2</sup> we read the instruction that each male aged between twenty and sixty should donate exactly half a shekel of silver.

The difference between these two kinds of donation is that the half shekel was a specific sum. Whether rich or poor, all had to give the same amount. Further, the demand for this donation was also restricted to adult males. Their donation was considered to be on behalf of the entire people.

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF  
cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.net

By contrast, there were no restrictions on the donations for the Sanctuary. Everyone could give as much as they pleased - gold, silver, copper, precious jewels, and so on.

Chassidic teachings explain that these two modes of donation tell us something about our own relationship with G-d.

The physical Sanctuary existed thousands of years ago; yet there is also a spiritual Sanctuary within each of us. The instructions concerning the physical Sanctuary help us create and maintain the Sanctuary within.

Let us start with the half shekel, which was a specific and limited sum. These silver coins were melted down and became the heavy blocks of silver which functioned as the foundation of the Sanctuary. The acacia wood planks, forming the walls, slotted in to the silver blocks.

This is telling us that there is a certain basic level of involvement that each of us needs as a healthy member of the Jewish people. Awareness of the key teachings of the Torah, and a basic level of observance of its laws. This helps each of us create the foundation of our private Sanctuary.

Beyond this, of course, there is much more. For each of us, man, woman or child, there are unlimited ways in which our Jewishness can be expressed. This is where we come to the concept of 'total commitment', the idea of a person who uses his or her skills, free time, artistic talents and professional acumen in order to try to strengthen the Jewish atmosphere in their own lives and in the community at large. This might also include looking more carefully at some of the small print of Jewish law, and trying to increase one's level of observance!

Through this one creates the full structure of the inner Sanctuary, with beautiful artefacts of gold, silver and precious jewels. This person has gone beyond the level of a basic minimum. His or her entire life has become an expression of the Jewish ideal<sup>3</sup>.

1. Exodus 38:21-40:38. 2. Exodus 30:11-16. Termed 'The Chapter of Shekalun' this is read before the beginning of the month of Adar (Adar II in a leap year, as this year). In Temple times during this month every family would donate an annual half a shekel so as to have a share in the Temple service. 3. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.3, pp.930-933.

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*SEDRA PEKUDEI*

**THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTS**

Everyone was talking about what a success the play had been. Everything had gone amazingly well – there were no mess ups and, as Leah was most thankful for, the scenery worked out great in the end – all the work had really paid off.

After the weeks of preparation, now all the girls involved could finally breathe! Aaah the feeling of satisfaction. Best of all, the money raised would be going towards orphans in Israel. So apart from being fun, the play had been most beneficial.

However, one girl's job wasn't yet over. In fact, to her it felt that it was only just beginning. Sarah Caster who was in charge of finance had just been approached by Mrs. Kayne who needed all the papers with the details of who gave what and how all the money had been spent. Sarah wasn't at all happy about this. Apart from the fact that she now had to spend hours looking through papers, invoices and receipts she also felt that they simply didn't trust her.

As she sat there squiggling numbers and marking down the various amounts, thoughts raced through her mind. I've given in all the money, she told herself. Why do I need to be so exact and meticulous with all the accounts? It means they don't trust me. That's why they want me to mark everything down to check I haven't done anything with any of the money! What do they think? That I'm going to go buy something for myself with it? The more she thought about it, the angrier she got, and the more dejected she felt. She looked over at the other side of the room where everyone was chatting excitedly. This was just so unfair!

All of a sudden, Leah who was chatting with the other girls, noticed Sarah sitting on the side writing furiously, her eyes creased together in concentration and annoyance. Pulling herself away from the group, Leah went to see what was bothering Sarah.

Thankful to have someone to listen to her complaints, Sarah vented her frustration. “So don’t you see how disgusting it is? I have to make sure every single detail is in order just so that they can be certain that I haven’t taken anything?” By the end of her speech, Sarah was almost in tears.

“Sarah,” Leah said, putting her arm around her friend. “I’m so sorry that’s how you feel. But you know, I doubt... in fact I’m *sure*, that is not why you have to be so careful with the accounts.”

Sarah raised her eyebrows.

“Well, you see,” Leah began, “we learnt the same kind of thing earlier this week in Sedra class. In this week’s Sedra it talks about how Moses counted all the donations from the people for the Tabernacle. The amount of gold donations was 29 talents, 730 shekels – he recorded the exact amount – not a rough estimate. Do you think Moses had to do that because G-d didn’t trust him? Course not! It’s because with public things we need to be extra careful to make sure that everything goes exactly where it’s supposed to be, and we don’t accidentally make mistakes. One thing’s for sure, you definitely shouldn’t feel that people don’t trust you! Don’t you see what a great job you’ve got and how important it is?!”

“Thanks Leah – you know that was really sweet. Know what, you also reminded me something else we learnt. This Shabbat, besides for reading the Sedra, we also read Parshat Shekalim, which talks about how all the Jews gave half a shekel. Moses counted the half shekels and that’s how he knew how many Jews there were... So there we see Moshe doing accounting again. Hey, I guess I really do have a cool job! Wanna join me in figuring out these sums?” Sarah asked.

“Sure!” Leah replied.

Sarah smiled and sat up just a little straighter, as they continued with the important responsibility with which they had been entrusted.

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