



**BEYOND THE USUAL PATTERN**

**D**AILY LIFE HAS A PATTERN, A STRUCTURE. YET SOMETIMES ONE has to go beyond the pattern, beyond the ordinary structure. This might happen particularly when one is discovering something new. It is exciting and inspiring, transforming one's life. At such moments one goes beyond limits and borders, in a positive and wholesome way.

The Sedra<sup>1</sup> tells of such a moment. Moses and the Jewish people have succeeded in completing the Sanctuary. They have fashioned the Golden Ark of the Covenant, the Golden Table, the Menorah and the Golden Altar for incense, which all go into the rectangular sacred Tent, in which are two compartments, the innermost being the Holy of Holies. The Tent stands in a large rectangular courtyard, in which is also the copper Altar. The courtyard is ringed by white curtains.

This entire structure was portable. During the forty years that the Jewish people wandered through the desert, whenever they were about to begin to travel it would be dismantled and loaded onto wagons. When they came to a stopping place it would be set up carefully in all its details. The Tent and the white curtains of the outer courtyard would be set up. Then the copper Altar and all the Golden objects would be placed in their correct places. Only then would it be possible to bring offerings on the Altar, to put the sacred Bread on the Golden Table, to light the Menorah, and to offer incense. Everything had to be ready, and then one could begin. There was an order, and the order and pattern had to be maintained.

In our Sedra, however, things are different. Here we see the very first time that the Sanctuary was set up. Before the Tent was completely finished, still lacking its front curtain, the Golden Ark was placed in the Holy of Holies, and the Golden Table, Menorah and Altar were placed in the outer compartment of the Tent. Then, at once, before the Tent was finished and before the courtyard curtains had been put up, the twelve loaves of bread were laid out on the Golden Table, the Menorah was lit, and incense was offered on the Golden Altar. Only then was the entrance curtain of the Tent put in place. Similarly, the outer copper Altar was erected and at once the daily offering was brought, before the white curtains of the courtyard had been set up<sup>2</sup>.

Why was there this rush to start using the Sanctuary before it was fully set up? Because this was with the mood of excitement and intensity of the first time, the very beginning of the sense of a spiritual bond with G-d. This intensity went beyond the pattern of the orderly setting up of the different parts of the Sanctuary. It was out of order, and yet it was right.

In fact this intensity is an important part of the life of each individual and, indeed, of the Jewish people as a whole. There are times of careful order, and times when one must go beyond that order. Our epoch of widespread assimilation and yet also with the potential of rapid change, is just such a moment. Before all the curtains have been put in place, we have to light the Golden Menorah and offer the incense. We have to inspire, and let ourselves be inspired, even though it might seem that we lack some of the basics and therefore are not yet ready for inspiration. Yet we should not worry. Following the example of Moses in the Sedra, we will go beyond the normal order of things.

Through this, seizing the moment, we will be able to create the full Sanctuary of the Jewish people who will connect the entire world to G-d<sup>3</sup>.

1. Exodus 38:21–40:38. 2. See Exodus 40:21-33. See Ibn Ezra to 40:2, and the contrasting view of Nachmanides (40:17). 3. Freely adapted from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 31 pp.218-225.

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*SEDRA PEKUDEI - CHAPTER OF SHEKALIM*

**COINS OF FIRE**

It was a beautiful box. It was made of bamboo wood, painted red and gold in glossy colours. Jody's uncle Chaim had gone to Thailand on business, and he had brought back this box as a present for his nephew.

"Thank you so much, uncle. It's a lovely box."

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Jody's older sister Miriam. She was very pleased with *her* present, a necklace of Chinese glass beads. Still, she was curious to know what Jody would do with his pretty box.

"I know," said Jody. "I'll make it into a Tzedaka Box, a box for Charity".

"That's a great idea," said his uncle. "It also connects to the Torah reading this Shabbat".

"How is that?" asked Jody. "The Sedra is all about the Sanctuary. So do you mean the way that people had to give gifts to make the Sanctuary? Their gifts were wool of different colours, and lots of gold and silver and copper. They wouldn't have fitted into this box!"

"No," said his sister. "We read something else from another Torah Scroll, that's what uncle means."

“Oh, you’re right!” said Jody. “About giving a half shekel.”

“That’s right,” said Uncle Chaim. “In the time of the Temple, every year people would give half a shekel of silver in Tzedaka. The money would be used for the offerings in the Temple. Also, the Haftorah this week is about a charity box they had in the Temple”.

“Do you know about the coin of fire?” asked Miriam.

“I heard about it...” said Jody vaguely. He could remember his teacher talking about it. The problem was, at the same time the boy next to him in school had been secretly showing him a game on his iPhone. This was very risky, since the day before, the same teacher had confiscated a phone and had not yet given it back. So the coin of fire was not very clear in his mind...

“Surely you remember,” said Miriam. “When G-d told Moses about the half shekel, Moses was not sure what was meant. Then G-d showed him a coin of fire, to explain it.”

“Oh, yes, I remember,” said Jody. “And when we give Charity, the coins we give are shining with fire, which comes from our heart.”

“But won’t the fire burn the box?” asked uncle Chaim, mischievously. “It’s made of wood. Perhaps you should have a metal box instead?”

“Of course not, it’s spiritual fire,” said Miriam. “Spiritual fire doesn’t burn, but it brings warmth and light.”

They all looked at Jody’s beautiful box, for Tzedaka, for coins of fire, from the heart. Then they each contributed some Tzedaka and put it in the box.

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