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MEANS TO AN END

HOW DO WE THINK OF WORK? AS A MEANS TO AN END, SOMETHING WE HAVE TO GET THROUGH, just looking forward to the weekend or vacation? Or, as something to which we are dedicated and devoted in itself? The beginning of this week's double Sedra¹ provides an added perspective: work can be *holy*, not only in itself, but in terms of where it leads: to Shabbat.

At the beginning of the first Sedra the Jewish people are told by Moses: "For six days work shall be done, and the seventh day shall be holy for you..." The phrasing is interesting: not "you shall do work", but "work shall be done". One way of understanding this phrase is that the Torah is suggesting that the work should get carried out - but not in a way that the person is enslaved to it. G-d makes the work happen, after the person invests the appropriate level of effort. The person makes the 'vessel', and G-d fills the vessel...

Of course, the work itself is important. The Sages tell us "Just as the Jewish people are commanded to keep Shabbat, so they are commanded to work"². Indeed, the work described in the Sedra is very sacred work: it is the building of the Sanctuary.

Nonetheless, despite its importance, there are also other considerations. The goal is that we work in an honest and dedicated way, getting maximum fulfilment from what we are doing – and that at

105 BAKER STREET , LONDON W1U 6EZ
www.chabadresearch.net - cru@LubavitchUK.com

the same time we remember that there are other dimensions to our lives: family, human relationships, Torah study, Mitzvot. All are significant.

The Torah, carefully choosing its phrasing, is giving us a message about our work during the six days of the week. The work has to get done. But we as individuals and as families mean more than the work we have the responsibility to complete....

Sometimes work can seem a quest for power, in terms of wealth or status or similar goals. Conversely, we can have a negative attitude to our work because it fails to produce such results. However, whatever the meaning and significance that our work might have in itself, it is also a means to attain profound goals which go beyond the actual work we do. These include supporting one's family, giving charity, living a Jewishly fulfilled life.

Work has two almost opposite possibilities: it can be pursued in terms which are predominately selfish, or it can be a route to implement goodness and holiness.

The Sedra is emphasising the sacred aspect of work. The work "is done" - yes. But the person's perception of the job, whether that of doctor or housewife, of businessman or cab driver, goes beyond the work in itself. Like the building of the Sanctuary, work is positive: it is a means to help, to give, to sustain, to connect with G-d in various ways. In addition, there is also a further focus: the seventh day, Shabbat. This is the fulfilment of one's week. It is not only a convenient release from the pressures of one's endeavours, but is also the true purpose for which one was striving.

Chassidic teachings state that on Shabbat, the 'Sanctuary' is complete. Our efforts during the week have in a spiritual sense come to fruition: hence no more work is required, or permitted³. At that point we could say, work *is* a means to an end: the holiness and delight of Shabbat⁴.

1. Exodus 35:1-40:38. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1, p.189, n.8, citing Mechilta of Rashbi and Avot deR. Natan ch.11. 3. Hence the 39 categories of work forbidden on Shabbat are based on the work needed to construct the Sanctuary. 4. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1, pp.187-193.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA VAYAKHEL – PEKUDEI

HONEST ACCOUNTS

Danny Weiss and Ron Schreiber were walking out of the school building at the end of the day. They were busy making calculations involving their money. That morning, they all had to bring in £2 to the class because they were collecting money to buy a present for their teacher who was leaving the school. When all the boys went to get their money to give to Leo, who was in charge of collecting the money, Danny had realized that he forgot the money on his bedside-table in his room.

Thankfully, Ron had some extra cash on him and gave £2 on behalf of Danny as well. Danny thanked him and assured him he would pay him back.

“So, Danny,” Ron was saying as they were approaching the school gate outside, “Would you mind doing me a favour? I really need new batteries for my walkie-talkie at home, and I don’t live near any shops that I could run over and pick some up. I know that you have a newsagent right around the corner from your house....”

“Of course, buddy,” Danny said before Ron could finish his sentence, “I can run over and pick some up for you.”

“Will you? Oh thank you! The brand I buy usually cost £2, so hey, use the £2 you owe me and then you don’t have to give me the money.” Ron described what brand he used and what size he needed.

“Okay that’s perfect. Alright then, see you tomorrow.” Danny waved and went on his way.

“Yeah, thanks a lot. Bye.”

After he got home from school, Danny got the money from his room and made his way over to buy the batteries. He arrived at the shop and found the batteries. He immediately noticed a big red sale sign there. The batteries usually cost £1.99, but now they were on offer for £1.49. A thought entered his mind – Ron was ready to pay the full price for them, and he would never know they were on sale. It became tempting that with the spare change he could buy himself his favourite chocolate bar in the kosher grocery shop next door.

It was then that he suddenly remembered something he learnt that week in the Sedra class. When the Jews had to donate materials to build the holy Tabernacle in the desert, Moses calculated all the materials used for this purpose so that no one would think that somebody kept any of the leftovers. The specific amount of gold, silver, and so on that were used, is recorded in the second of this week's double Sedra, Pekudei. Danny remembered how his teacher added that this teaches us to always be careful when handling someone else's money and be exact with the amounts.

A small voice entered Danny's head saying "Oh common Danny, Ron will never know..." Another voice came and argued, "But, you have to be honest with the money. It doesn't belong to you."

"Yeah, but Moses did that so long ago, what's it got to do with you?"

"Well obviously if the Torah records the specific amounts, it must be important. It's teaching you a lesson. It's the solution to your dilemma right here Danny. The change belongs to Ron!"

Danny shook his head and pushed the voices away. The second voice was right. His teacher was right. Moses was right. The change would go right back to Ron.

He bought the batteries with a smile on his face. It always felt good to make the right decision.

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