



## Around the Shabbat Table

**Shabbat Pekudei 5765**

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**Shalom!**

### Introduction

This week's parasha, Pekudei, is the last portion in the book of Exodus. It is one in a series of portions found in Exodus that discusses the building of the *mishkan*, the Tabernacle that the Israelites carried with them on their desert journey. At this point in the Torah, the building is almost complete and God gives instructions for making garments for the priests who will be in charge of the Tabernacle and its maintenance.

The priest's clothing consisted of a breast plate and shoulder pieces to hold the breast plate on, both made of gold, and fine cloth. On the breast plate were twelve precious stones, one for each tribe of Israel. The priests also wore robes with bells on the hems, coats and other clothes of similar material and design and a crown with the words "Holiness to the Lord" engraved upon it.

The Tabernacle is then completed, and the text gives a summary of the different pieces included in the Tabernacle and in the priests' clothes. Moses then blesses the people for the work that they have done.

In the final chapter of Exodus, the priests are chosen and anointed, and a detailed description is given of the work they will do in the Tabernacle. Finally, a cloud covers the tent and the glory of God fills the tent. This cloud also serves as a signal for the children of Israel on their journey. When the cloud is over the tent, they stay where they are; when it is lifted, it guides them to their next place. The cloud guides them during the day and a pillar of fire is their guide at night.

This week there is a special *maftir*, a special additional section, read in addition to the parasha. This portion is called *shekalim* and it is always read two weeks before the holiday of Purim. In these few verses, God tells Moses to count the people by having each person over the age of 20 contribute a half-shekel (unit of money). The rich may not give more and the poor may not give less.



## Questions for your Family's Discussion

As your family shares a meal this Friday night, you might want to discuss the following questions:

1. There is often discussion in Judaism about which is more important, sacred time or sacred space. Many people point out that the first thing that God created in the Torah is time (God separates the light from the darkness). Others point to the careful specifications given for the building of the tabernacle as a sign that space is of utmost importance.
  - What do you think this parasha adds to that debate?
  - In what ways does the celebration of Shabbat have to do with both sacred time and sacred space?
  - What are some times that are sacred to you? Some spaces?
2. There are three mitzvot (commandments) associated with the holiday of Purim. They are, hearing the reading of the *Megillah*, giving gifts to your friends and giving gifts of money and food to the poor.
  - Given Purim's focus on the poor, why do you think the maftir for Shekalim is connected to Purim?
  - Why were the rich not allowed to give more in this situation?
  - How does this mandate to give help everyone in the community maintain his/her dignity?

## Texts to Wrestle With

Rashi, an eleventh century commentator who wrote on almost every verse of the Torah and on the Talmud, wrote some interesting comments on the parasha we are studying. In the first verse, the word *mishkan*, tabernacle, is mentioned twice in a row. Rashi says that this is an allusion to the fact that God will destroy the temple twice as collateral for Israel's sins.

Rashi's second comment, also on the first verse, says that the *mishkan* was built as a witness to the fact that God forgave the Israelite people even after the incident golden calf, in which they built an idol and bowed down to it.

In comments on one verse, we see a picture of God who remembers the sins of the Israelites and punishes them for it, and a picture of God who forgives the Israelites after they sin.

- What kind of God do you see in these comments?
- What is the benefit of portraying God in so many conflicting ways?
- How do you see God?
- Do some of your pictures conflict?



## Towards an Action Agenda

In the *maftir*, we are told that everyone in Israel must contribute to the census being taken of the people. One reason is that Moses had to know how many people were eligible to fight should the Israelites need to engage in a war. Another reason is that all the people of Israel should know who is in their community and be responsible for one another. Research some of the problems in your Jewish community and abroad and remember that we are all part of the same people.

- You can learn more about some of the problems facing your local Jewish community (and ways you can help!) by going to the website of your local Jewish federation. In the greater New York area, UJA-Federation is found as [www.ujafedny.org](http://www.ujafedny.org) . If you don't know your community's federation site, you can find it by searching [www.ujc.org](http://www.ujc.org).
- You can learn about some of the problems facing people throughout the world (and learn how you can help!) by visiting the website of the American Jewish World Service, an organization that helps Jews and non-Jews in developing nations around the world at [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org) .
- Remember, in the Torah everyone had to contribute a small amount, but it was the fact that everyone was contributing together that made it meaningful. See if you can find others in your family and your neighborhood to assist you in helping those in need.
- The tabernacle was designed as a dwelling place for God and so it had to be very beautiful. Our synagogue and other prayer and learning spaces are modeled after that tabernacle. Call your local school, synagogue, hospital or nursing home and ask if you can help make their spaces beautiful by creating art that they can hang on their windows and walls. The more people working on the project, the more fun it will be, so get some of your friends to help you!

## Shabbat Shalom!



Our thanks to Dr. Steven Brown and his colleagues at Jewish Theological Seminary of America for identifying a talented group of students to write materials for Around the Shabbat Table.

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to [RavADS@bjeny.org](mailto:RavADS@bjeny.org)

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan, project coordinator, at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: [www.bjeny.org](http://www.bjeny.org)

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