



The Power to Serve

Powerful people exercise control over others that obscures their view of G-d. Good people employ kindness and respect and marshal their resources to highlight G-d's power and presence.

This correlation links the Torah's religious and social responsibilities, *bein adam laMakom u'bein adam lachaveiro*, symbolized by the twin *luchot* (tablets) given to Moshe at Sinai, and specifically informs the teachings that immediately followed the Sinai experience, the intricate interpersonal *mishpatim* (monetary laws) and the *mishkan* (Temple) building project.

Limits on interpersonal domination are the unifying theme of the laws in *Parshat Mishpatim*, beginning with the limitations on slavery and continuing with the responsibility to make whole anyone whom we may have economically harmed. The foundation of all these laws was established at Sinai where we were taught that we are subject solely to G-d and not to other men (see Rashi to 21:6). Then, in next week's parsha, we move on to the mitzvah of building G-d's home on earth, the *mishkan*. This is introduced as a funding project, using our resources to construct a home for G-d (Shemot 25:1-8).



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Taken together these two teachings combine to share this strong message: In a world where people can easily use personal and financial power to control or dominate others, we are to use it instead to humbly recognize the All-powerful. The most powerful members of our nation, the Jewish kings, were enjoined from amassing wealth that would serve to accentuate their personal mastery over their subjects and distract them from their submission to the King of Kings (Devarim 17:17-18). Instead, the kingdom of David was built upon his passion to build G-d a *mikdash*, leading the nation to join the king in positively deploying their resources for the purpose of building G-d's presence on earth.

This message lies at the heart of the mitzvah of *shekalim* that is the focus of our additional reading this Shabbat. The Talmud (Megillah 13b) teaches that the annual Rosh Chodesh Adar national campaign to fund the Temple service provided the antidote to Haman's scheme in the Purim story (see Tosafot Megillah 16a). Haman pledged 10,000 blocks of silver to buy the heads of the Jewish people. This was the ultimate power grab; one man using his money to dominate others. The antidote to that scheme was the Jewish national effort to pool their resources in a shared project, where the rich do not dominate the poor (Shemot 30:15), and where all join to build and service the home of the One who truly rules us all.

Every Purim, we deploy our resources to benefit others in fulfillment of the mandates of *mishloach manot u'matanot l'evyonim*. We provide each other with care and support,

following the example of Esther, that powerful Jewess who used her power to help her people and risked her own life for the sake of others. That obvious dedication to others and humble use of power would seed Esther's more hidden legacy to the Jewish people, as it was Esther's son, King Daryavesh (Vayikra Rabba 13:5), who would use his power to build the recognition of G-d by his role in the rebuilding of G-d's home on this earth, the Second Bait Hamikdash. Queen and king, mother and son, leveraged their unparalleled commanding positions to perform kindness and to build recognition of the Almighty.

This is a powerful lesson that can guide us forward with kindness and humility to the building of G-d's ultimate home on earth, the third and final Bait Hamikdash, soon in our days, Amein. ■

Lenny Davidman

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