

## **A beka for every head, a half-shekel to the sacred shekel for everyone who passed through the census takers. (38:26)**

So many people contributed towards the *Mishkan*. One might think that due to the sheer numbers of contributors, the individual contribution/contributor would become lost in the shuffle. Such thoughts are the result of a small mind or limited cognitive ability. Nothing is insignificant in the eyes of Hashem. Indeed, this is true concerning all spirituality. Everything counts. One never knows what good can result from a single act of spirituality. The following vignettes underscore this idea.

A young *Kollel* fellow maintained an outreach program out of a small *shul* in central *Eretz Yisrael*. He was extremely dedicated to his mission and was quite successful at it. One day, a young, assimilated college student visited his *shul* and requested an overview of Judaism. He was obviously a bright young man, evidenced by the fact that he was enrolled in a fellowship program in one of the country's most prestigious schools. He was a physics major. He clearly presented himself as a level-headed, highly intelligent young man who was sincerely interested in finding out about Judaism. After an hour of presenting cogent questions and receiving satisfactory answers, he appeared satisfied with what he had learned about the Jewish religion. This young man was, of course, Jewish, but assimilated. As an Israeli, he knew how to read Hebrew, but he was at a total loss with regard to navigating his way through the *siddur*. When the *shul* members came to *daven Minchah*, he asked to join them. Not knowing his way around the *siddur*, his recital of the *Shemoneh Esrai* took a bit longer than that of the rest of the congregants, as he read every word: *Yaaleh v'yavo, nacheim, Aneinu, Al HaNissim/Purim, Chanukah*, etc. His sincerity compensated for his lack of knowledge.

Finally, after *Minchah*, the *Kollel* fellow inquired of his newly-found student what had catalyzed/inspired his visit. He explained the following: "One day, as I was returning home from school, I was sitting on an Eged bus and reading the daily newspaper. Suddenly, I noticed an observant Jew bend down on the floor to pick up a soiled piece of bread (probably left by a child) and hold it in his hand for the duration of his ride. As we both alighted from the bus at the same stop, I asked the man, 'Why did you pick up that soiled piece of bread and hold it in your hand until now (when he put it into a garbage bin)?' He explained that he had acted in accordance with *Halachah* that requires one not to permit food to be defiled, but rather, he should pick it up and put it in its proper place. I was so impressed with his response that I felt it behooved me to learn more about Judaism."

On the next visit to the *shul*, the student brought a few of his friends with him who were quite distant from anything Jewish. Indeed, the school that they attended was staffed by professors whose love for observance did not exist. It all started with a Jew picking up a soiled piece of bread. This served as the catalyst for a group of assimilated young Jews to return to their roots. One small step engendered the spiritual deliverance of a group of lost Jews. We should never belittle the little

things that people do. What may be small to us is quite large on the spiritual screen.

*Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita*, relates the story of a critically ill man who required serious life-saving surgery. The earliest possible time when it could be performed was on *Shabbos*. Since his life was in danger, the sick man agreed to have the surgery take place on *Shabbos*. The procedure required a 500 dollar co-pay, which the surgeon insisted the man sign for payment prior to surgery. Otherwise, the procedure would not be performed. The patient replied that the surgeon would have to accept his word concerning payment, since signing a paper was not included in the *halachic* dispensation of *pikuach nefesh*, life-threatening deeds. In other words, *chillul Shabbos*, *Shabbos* desecration, could occur in order to save a life, but signing a contract was not part of the life-saving process.

The surgeon was adamant, refusing to perform the surgery unless he saw a signature on the contract. When the Jew saw that it was either sign his name or lose out on the surgery, he acquiesced to sign the contract. Instead of writing *chameish meios*, 500, however, he wrote *elef*, 1000. The surgeon asked, "Why did you obligate yourself to pay 1000 dollars when all I wanted was 500 dollars?" The patient's response should inspire us all, "I did not want to write two words when I could get by with one. The money? I would rather lose 500 dollars than add to my *Shabbos* desecration."

When the surgeon heard this, he was so impressed at a fellow Jew's love for the institution of *Shabbos* (that he was prepared to lose money not to write an extra word) that this act of conviction catalyzed the surgeon's personal journey of spiritual return to Judaism. One small act, an act which "some" might view as insignificant, changed future generations.