

# Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei

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Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

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The Fax of Life

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**GOOD MORNING!** Perhaps one of the most oft-overlooked realities of living is that one's life is dynamic and not static. This means that if we aren't moving forward then we are moving backward. This applies to every aspect of our lives and, as we shall see, it is the very definition of our humanity.

**Thus**, we must make a concerted effort to continually move forward in all areas of our lives or risk serious declination. Practically speaking, this means we must constantly work on our health and wellbeing (what happens when we don't brush our teeth?), our knowledge base (what happens when we don't use a language for a long time?), our relationships (what happens when we ignore our loved ones – or the Almighty?), and our careers (what happens when we don't stay current in our field?).

**In fact**, this constant need to move forward is perhaps the defining difference between mankind and angelic beings. Angels – those powerful heavenly creations that are both agents and servants of the Almighty – were created with a deep connection to the Divine and an almost infinite capacity for understanding and comprehension of all things holy. They are closest (in proximity) to God and are first to receive God's influence and from them it gets filtered down into the physical world.

**By contrast**, mankind – particularly after Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden – is mired in physicality. Although man was created with a holy and divine soul, this soul is housed within a physical form. After man's sin in the Garden of Eden he became primarily physical, and anything that is primarily physical is always in a state of flux. This is why man's life is defined by his inexorable and constant state of decline; the word mortal comes from the Latin *mortalis* – death.

**However**, there is one area in which man far surpasses angels: the ability to grow, achieve, and become far more than what he was. This is the gift of free will that the Almighty bestowed on man; that man, through his efforts, can grow and become far more than merely a physical form. Man can strive to connect to his eternal soul, build a relationship with the Almighty, and earn a sense of eternity.

**Angels**, on the other hand, though possessing extraordinary features, are truly static beings that can neither grow nor decline. This is why they are often referred to in the Torah as "standing" (see *Isaiah* 6:2 and *Zechariah* 3:7), because they stay in their original space. On the other hand, man is referred to as "moving" (see *Zechariah* *ibid.*) for he has an almost unlimited potential for growth.

**But** with the potential for growth also comes the potential for lethargy and decline. This is really the source and strength of the Evil Inclination – the agent of the Almighty that is charged with constantly testing man and challenging him to properly exercise his free will (or fail to do so). Because one of the most important aspects of life is to constantly move forward, the counterforce to that is the innate desire for inactivity.

**I am** reminded of the following joke. A man went to see his doctor complaining that he felt lethargic and wasn't up to doing things around the house like he did in previous years. The doctor gave him a thorough examination and tested him for all sorts of medical issues that may be causing his general malaise.

**When** the doctor completed all the tests he came back into the room. The patient said, "Doc, give it to me straight, I can handle it. Tell me, in plain English, what's wrong with me?" The doctor replied, "Well, in plain English, nothing's wrong with you – you're just plain lazy."

"**Okay**," the man said slowly, "Now give me the medical term so that I can tell it to my wife."

**We find** in the *Scriptures* a verse related to this issue; "*For man was born to toil [...]*" (*Job* 5:7).

**The 19th century sage**, Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Wisser, (better known by his acronym – "Malbim") makes a fascinating comment on this verse: "A person was born to toil and earn a living through his efforts. A person that achieves wealth without toil and hard work is living a falsehood and in the end his children will never benefit from it. For the main success of a person depends on the effort he expends."

**True happiness** in life is a byproduct of self-accomplishment. People who are motivated to achieve and grow are constantly looking for opportunities to improve themselves and their situation; hiring life coaches, advancing their education, scheduling family time, etc. In short, they create situations that ensure continual growth. (Though, to be fair, self-accomplishment alone does not guarantee happiness; there are many other elements a person must have in his life to be truly happy.)

**King Solomon**, known as "the wisest of all men," wrote several of the books that are counted among the holy books known as *Scriptures*. I have counted at least thirty different verses in the books of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastics* in which King Solomon writes about the different aspects of laziness.

**In the book** of *Proverbs* (26:13), King Solomon makes a rather enigmatic statement regarding laziness: "A lazy

person says there is a lion in the road.”

**On the surface** this is very strange: If there is truly a lion in the road, then he isn't lazy. He's being prudent because it's dangerous to venture outside. If there is no lion in the road, then he isn't lazy he's delusional. Why does King Solomon characterize him as lazy?

**In this week's** Torah reading we find another example of laziness. The Torah portion discusses all the gifts that were donated by the Jewish people in the desert to build the Tabernacle – known in Hebrew as the *Mishkan*.

“And the *Nesi'im* [heads of the tribes] brought onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate” (35:27).

**The famous** medieval commentator known as Rashi explains that the heads of the tribes decided that they should wait to see what everyone else would contribute and then they would supply whatever was still missing.

**But** they underestimated the generous spirit of the people; almost everything necessary for the building of the Tabernacle was quickly donated. The only thing left for them to contribute were the precious stones mentioned in the verse. Rashi continues, “Because they were lazy a letter was removed from their title.” (The Hebrew letter “*yud*” was omitted from their name.)

**Rashi's** characterization of the tribal heads as being lazy can be difficult to comprehend. After all, they offered to complete whatever was missing from the communal contributions. In essence, they were offering to deficit-fund the construction of the *Mishkan*. This is every fundraiser's dream. Obviously, they cared enough to make sure that the *Mishkan* would be completed properly; so, why are they referred to as lazy?

**The key** to understanding laziness is the analysis of individual motivation. Is the motivation internal or is it based on external factors? Do I go to work because I want to be productive or because I need to go grocery shopping and pay my rent? Do I want to get the project done or am I doing it because otherwise my boss will yell at me?

**This** is what King Solomon is saying: Of course there is a lion on the road, but a lazy person sees that as an insurmountable obstacle, while an industrious person just looks at the situation as a problem that he must overcome. After all, there are a multitude of solutions to almost any situation. Lazy people find excuses while motivated people find workarounds.

**This** was the mistake of the heads of tribes. They weren't motivated enough to actually help with the building of the *Mishkan*; they were only motivated by the external pressure of not having a *Mishkan*. This is why they only offered to deficit fund the project, in case the Jewish people did not come through. However, as community leaders, they should have led the contributions. For this reason, they are called lazy and had a letter removed from their name. (The Torah tells us in *Numbers* that they actually learned from their mistake and by the inauguration of the altar they were the first to contribute.)

**Motivated** people are always looking to move forward and grow. They take on responsibilities that spur them to ever higher levels of achievement – even though it often increases the pressure on other aspects of their lives. But they have internalized and understand that if they aren't moving forward then they're moving backwards – and that's just not acceptable.

**TORAH PORTION:** Vayakhel-Pekudei, Exodus 35:1 - 40:38

**Moses** relays the Almighty's commands to refrain from building the *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle or Portable Sanctuary) on Shabbat, to contribute items needed to build the *Mishkan*, to construct the components of the *Mishkan* and the appurtenances of the *Cohanim*. The craftsmen are selected, the work begins. The craftsmen report that there are too many donations, and for the first and probably the only time in fundraising history, the Jewish people are told to refrain from bringing additional contributions!

**Pekudei** includes an accounting of all the materials that went into the making of the *Mishkan* and details of the construction of the clothing of the *Cohanim*. The Tabernacle is completed, Moses examines all of the components and gives his approval to the quality and exactness of construction, the Almighty commands to erect the Tabernacle, it's erected and the various vessels are placed in their proper place.

**SHABBAT LIGHTING:** *Jerusalem* 5:12 Miami 7:12 Cape Town 6:44 Guatemala 5:54 Hong Kong 6:16 Honolulu 6:23 Jo'Burg 6:04 LA 6:44 London 5:52 Melbourne 7:19 Mexico 6:28 Moscow 6:18 New York 6:46 Singapore 6:58 Toronto 7:08

**“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”:** No pressure, no diamond. — Thomas Carlyle

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**Shareef Malnik**



Shabbat Shalom,

*Witzchak Zweig*

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