

The Doctor Who Changed the World

BY DON JARASHOW

For centuries, smallpox was one of the most feared diseases in the world. Caused by the variola virus, it spread rapidly and killed about thirty percent of those who caught it. Victims suffered high fever and painful blisters that covered the body, and survivors were often left scarred or blind. Entire cities lived in fear of outbreaks.

In the late 1700s, an English doctor named Edward Jenner noticed something unusual: milkmaids who had caught the mild disease cowpox almost never seemed to get smallpox. Most doctors dismissed the idea, but Jenner could not ignore what he had seen.

In 1796 he tested his theory by introducing material from a cowpox sore into the arm of a young boy, James Phipps. The boy became mildly ill but recovered. When later exposed to smallpox, he did not become sick.

Jenner had unknowingly discovered the world's first vaccine. Though mocked at first, his method spread across the world. In 1980 the World Health Organization declared smallpox completely eradicated.

Historians estimate that Jenner's discovery has saved hundreds of millions of lives, all beginning with one small observation others overlooked. Sometimes a small act, a small contribution, or a small insight can carry far greater significance than we ever imagine.

CONTRADICTION?

In this week's parsha, the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks a strong and well-known question, a contradiction.

Regarding the building of the vessels of the Mishkan, the Torah describes the donations brought by the people with wording that seems contradictory:

והמלאכה היתה דים לכליהמלאכה לעשות אתה והותר.

The work was sufficient for all the work to do it — and there was extra.

If the materials were sufficient, that implies they were exactly what was needed, not more. But if there was extra, then it was more than what was required.

So which was it? Was it precisely sufficient, or was there excess material?

How can the Torah describe the donations as both דים, sufficient, and הותר, extra, at the very same time?

THE BALANCE OF SUFFICIENCY AND SURPLUS

The Mayana Shel Torah quotes the Sichos Tzaddikim, which offers a deep and *lomdishe pshat*.

The donations for the Mishkan did indeed contain both elements mentioned in the verse: דים and הותר, sufficient and surplus.

Why was this necessary?

If the donations had been exactly the required amount, precisely what was needed and nothing more, it actually would not have been ideal. The true purpose of the Mishkan was not simply to construct a building, but to create a place where the Shechinah would dwell.

Had the amount been exact, people might have begun thinking with pride: "My donation completed the Mishkan. Without my contribution, the work could not have been finished."

Such a mindset is antithetical to the Mishkan, which holds the Shechinah, as the Shechinah does not dwell in a place of *gaavah*.

Therefore the donations could not be exact.

On the other hand, if there had been a clear surplus with donations

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left unused, people might have walked away brokenhearted. Each person could have wondered: “Perhaps my donation was the one that was not used. Maybe I have no share in building the Mishkan.”

And that sense of humility, that broken heart, is precisely what allows the Shechinah to dwell, as the pasuk says:

אֲשַׁכֵּן אֶת דַּכָּא.

I dwell with the crushed and humble of spirit.

Incredibly, it emerges that if the donations had only been exactly sufficient, it would actually have been lacking, because people would have become haughty. Precisely because there was a surplus, which could awaken humility within people, only then were the donations truly sufficient.

Through both elements of enough and surplus, a balance was created that brought about the resting of the Divine Presence.

The Ohr HaChaim offers another *pshat*, explaining how דים and והוטר can coexist.

The *pasuk* is teaching us something about how beloved we are in the eyes of Hashem.

Just as today there are wealthy people and those of more modest means, the generation that built the Mishkan was no different. There were Yidden who could barely afford the minimum contribution, and others who could bring far more. Many brought materials in great abundance.

But this created a problem.

The Mishkan required a very precise amount of materials. If people continued bringing donations beyond that measure, inevitably there would be extra. Some of what was brought would appear unnecessary.

So what was the solution? Hashem performed a miracle that defied nature, as we find in other aspects of the Mishkan.

Out of concern for the honor of every individual who exerted himself to bring a donation, everything that was brought was incorporated into the work of the Mishkan. Even though by natural calculation not all the materials were needed, nothing was left unused.

This is the meaning of the verse: the work was sufficient for the work that Hashem commanded, and yet there was extra. There was more than required, but the vessel was able to contain beyond its natural measure.

NOTHING IS WASTED

The Mishchas Shemen explains that from here we learn a powerful lesson.

Every effort a person invests in serving Hashem is precious. Every

struggle, every small exertion, every sincere attempt rises before the Eibeshter.

Nothing is wasted.

Every effort is received Above. Every small act brings satisfaction before Hashem, who cares even for the smallest measure of a person's effort and honor.

At times we feel that the past shapes us. It can be hard to move beyond past failures, negative tendencies, old routines, or the habit of settling for mediocrity instead of striving for strength.

Now, as we lift ourselves from the darkness of winter and transition into days of light, days of *ketzirah* and harvesting, we cannot forget that there is a bigger picture. There is much to accomplish. The work is great and the time is short.

We all know this. But implementing it is often difficult.

Parshas HaChodesh carries a powerful inner message: *hischadshus*, renewal.

A Jew is never locked into what was yesterday. Our *avodah* is always to move forward, to rise higher, to grow.

As we approach Parshas HaChodesh, the very word *chodesh* reminds us of this idea. *Chodesh* means renewal. It is the power to begin again. A Yid always has the ability to start fresh.

And with the *koach* that HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives us, with *tefillah* and with *siyata dishmaya*, we can attain and achieve things we never thought were possible. Because when a person connects himself to Hashem, nothing is beyond reach.

Like the doctor whom everyone mocked but who ultimately changed the world with the vaccine, we too can change. We can change ourselves and our destiny with a small action, a small shift.

As you read this, you may wonder: what is one small thing I can do? But the Torah reminds us that every action is cherished. Like the donations to the Mishkan, where everything was ultimately used, even when there seemed to be no place for it, our efforts and all our *ameilus* are desired by Hashem and bear fruit, often when we do not see it.

Dr. Jenner likely felt rejected and discouraged amid the many naysayers he faced. Yet he remained resilient and ultimately changed the world.

We too, with resilience and belief in ourselves, can change worlds, the world around us and certainly our inner world. •

“Every effort a person invests in serving Hashem is precious.”

