



## Positive Accomplishments • Parshat Pekudei

*Parshat Pekudei* celebrates the culmination of the building of the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle. After several lengthy chapters delineating the structural instructions and subsequent creation of the Tabernacle and vessels, the verse reports that “all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting was completed” (Ex 39:32). The verses explicitly state three times towards the end of chapter 29, that the Israelites did “just as God commanded” (Ex. 39:32, 39:42, 39:43). Moses reflected on the *Mishkan’s* implementation and the grandeur of the finished product and then blessed the Israelites. Gersonides notes that Moses behaved as a moral exemplar; a leader should always praise his people’s accomplishments. By doing so, he or she fosters a healthy sense of pride, which also enhances motivation for future success.

Celebrating accomplishments is an important value in human growth. In formulating his vision for the psychology of flourishing, Dr. Martin Seligman offered the acronym PERMA to represent five important areas related to happiness and well-being. “P” stands for positive emotions, “E” for engagement, “R” for relationships, “M” for meaning, and “A” represents accomplishment. Focusing on the latter, Pninit Russo-Netzer and Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar point out that accomplishment that leads to psychological flourishing is not about attainment of external rewards or the seeking of recognition from others, but “focuses on achievements that nurture the self and others academically, physically, emotionally, socially, and

spiritually” (*Positive Education*, 2015). It is this type of intrinsic and holistic accomplishment that generates happiness.

Exploring the commentaries related to the completion of the Tabernacle, we are left with an inspiring model of accomplishment that parallels positive psychology’s meaningful conceptualization of the construct.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch directly connects the completion of the Tabernacle with happiness and well-being. Moses celebrated two important elements. First was the fact that “*they* had made it” (Ex 39:43). Everyone had an active role in its development. Each individual’s personality, devotion, and voluntary enthusiasm formed a broader, more cohesive collective. Second was the dedication and commitment to Divine command. Fulfilling the Divine will with such devotion, writes Rabbi Hirsch, leads one to an ultimate sense of unparalleled happiness, fulfillment, and moral elevation.

Noticing the nuanced shift in terminology from two words that mean work: *avodah* in verse 42, and *melakha* in verse 43, Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik distinguishes between the two types of work that were necessary in the construction of the Tabernacle. *Avodah* reflects the mindset and output of a servant. There is no space for creativity or individuality. To succeed in *avodah* obedience is necessary. *Melakha*, however, “embodies the personality” of the worker. It entails autonomy and encourages individuality.

The successful balancing of this dialectic warranted celebration. There was both devotional *avodah* along with creative *melakha*. Moses encouraged contributions of the heart fueled by intrinsic motivation accompanying individualistic artistic and aesthetic capabilities. And he also continually reinforced doing “just as God commanded.”

By analyzing the celebration of this remarkable

achievement, we are left with a powerful formula for fulfillment and flourishing. Working towards meaningful achievements that utilize our whole selves, uniting to form a powerful social collective, while also fulfilling the will of God can lead to happiness. Moses praised the completion of the Tabernacle; this should inspire us to strive for and rejoice in the accomplishment of our goals and the goals of others.

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**Character Challenge:** When you notice others accomplishing meaningful goals, take the time to praise and celebrate their achievement.

**Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l:** “Celebration is an essential part of motivating. When we celebrate the achievements of others, we change lives” (“Celebrate,” *Covenant & Conversation*)