

# “You and I will Change the World” – Part 1

28 Adar 1, 5774

(Notes taken by Moshe Genuth during class, not reviewed nor edited by Harav Ginsburgh)

## 1. *The root pakod – finding my role*

### **Parashat Pekudei: The time to find my role**

Lechaim, lechaim. A good evening. Our topic this evening is how to create a positive change in the Jewish people in our holy land. Like every topic, it is appropriate to connect it with the weekly parashah. There is a concept in Chassidut called “living with the times,” which means seeing our lives—be it our life as individuals or our communal life—from the perspective of the weekly parashah.

The weekly parashah is Pekudei, which begins with the verse, “These are the amounts given to the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of testimony, accounted for Moshe, the work of the Levites was under the direction of Itamar the son of Aharon the priest” (אֵלֶּה הַמְּשָׁכָן מְשָׁכָן הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר פָּקַד עַל פִּי מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹדַת הַלְוִיִּם בְּיַד אִיתָמָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן (פקודי המשכן משכן העדות אשר פקד על פי משה עבודת הלוויים ביד איתמר בן אהרן). Therefore we will talk tonight about the inner meaning of the word Pekudei (here translated as “amount”) and connect it with the important topic of role (תפקיד)—the role that each of us has to play in life. One’s role pertains to one’s family, and with respect to the klal—the entire community of the Jewish people.

### **The many roles in Pekudei**

In this verse, the Tabernacle is described as a place of testimony. It testifies to the fact that the Divine Presence dwells upon the Jewish people, as a people and upon each one individually. We can thus understand the verse as saying that the appearance of the Divine Presence depends on *Pekudei hamishkan*, the fact that every one of the people has an appointment, a role that they play.

Of course, the literal meaning of the first two words, Pekudei hamishkan means the amount of the materials from which the Tabernacle was made, the continuation of the verse already states that the one doing the counting, the one with the role of accounting for the amounts was Moshe Rabbeinu (אשר פקד על פי משה). Moshe Rabbeinu has the central role, and all other roles are under his supervision. In addition, there is the work of the Levites, the many roles that the Levites play in the Tabernacle under the supervision of Itamar the son of Aharon.

The next verse stresses the importance of one's role even more. It describes how, "Betzalel the son of Uri the son of Chur from the tribe of Yehudah carried out all that God had commanded Moshe" (וּבְצִלְאֵל בֶּן אֹרִי בֶן חוּר לְמִטֵּה יְהוּדָה עָשָׂה אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הוֹי' אֶת (מֹשֶׁה)). There is no one else in the Torah described as having performed his role and duty so perfectly as Betzalel who, "carried out all that God had commanded Moshe" (עָשָׂה אֵת (כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הוֹי' אֶת מֹשֶׁה)). To carry out all that God had commanded Moshe means performing the entire Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu. Betzalel is part of a whole group of artisans. The Jewish people needs many artisans, among them musicians, etc. Together with him stood Aholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan. So in all, there are many roles that are described at the beginning of our parashah, many roles that were given in the Tabernacle, in the making of the Tabernacle, and each person needs to know and perform his role. And once more, this role is the one he serves vis a vis the klal—the community.

### **Meditating on the root Pakad**

Now let's look at the 3 letter root of פקד. It has many different meanings. A person is created to be a social being, and a speaking being. When God created man the Torah describes that man became "a living psyche" and Onkelos translates these words as "possessing a speaking spirit." That is why a human is defined as a speaker (מְדַבֵּר), even more essential than being "a thinker" (מְשַׁבֵּיל).

Human beings speak language, and a Jew speaks the holy tongue. So the first meditation is to know the roots of our language, Hebrew, and from here all things are revealed. The first thing to look at is the Radak's Book of Roots (*Sefer Hashorashim*). The Radak was one of the greatest Rishonim, and he was the greatest of the grammarians. He has two books the *Michlol* and the *Shorashim*. About the root פקד he has one of the lengthiest entries, spanning many pages. He identifies 6 different meanings (which he calls עֲנִינִים) in this root.

### **Pakad as appointment**

The first is that it means to appoint someone to a task or role (לְמִנּוּת). Like in Megilat Esther where it says, "The king appointed clerks" (וַיִּפְקֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים). There is the one giving the appointment, and there is the one receiving it, the one who has been given a role and is called a *pakid*. A common idiom in the Bible is to describe appointing someone to a certain role as "to fill someone's hands."<sup>1</sup> In addition, an appointment is sometimes described with the word "burden" (מְשָׁרָה), for instance the Mashiach is described as carrying the burden upon his shoulders (וַתְּהִי הַמְּשָׁרָה עַל שִׁכְמוֹ).

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<sup>1</sup>. See for instance just in our *chumash*: Exodus 28:41, 29:9, 32:29, and many more.

## **Pakad as remembering and awakening to act**

The second meaning, which is the first time when this root is mentioned in the Torah, is in the verse, “And God remembered Sarah as He had said, and God did unto Sarah what He had said” (וְהוּי פָקַד אֶת שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דָּבַר). What did God do? He gave her pregnancy. So it means to remember, but not just recollection, but with an inner awakening, leading to act on behalf of the individual remembered. It could be something good like in this instance regarding Sarah, but it could also be something negative, for instance God remembers the sins of an individual and punishes succeeding generations (פָּקַד עֵינָי אֶבֶת עַל בְּנֵי). There is a phrase in the prophets, “the inhabitants of Pekod”<sup>2</sup> (יֹשְׁבֵי פֶקוֹד). Pekod is a connotation for Babylon (either the entire country or just a single city, it is unclear), and it is so called, because God remembers their sins.

## **Pakad as a mitzvah—a commandment**

The third meaning is a mitzvah, like in the verse, “The commandments of God are righteous, they bring joy to the heart” (פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׂרָאֵל מְשֻׁמְחֵי לֵב). A mitzvah means a commandment, like a command in the army.

## **Pakad as counting**

A fourth meaning is like in the first verse of our parashah, where it means an accounting. The fourth *chumash*, Bamidbar is called by the sages *Chumash Hepekudim*, because the Jewish people are counted many times in it. Every time God counts the Jewish people, it is a sign that He loves them, like a person who counts something that he loves, like someone who counts his money. There are two words for counting. The other is מְנִיָּה, or מְנִין, which is similar to the meaning we saw above for Pakod: giving someone a role, appointing someone to a task.

## **Pakad as lack**

The fifth meaning is “a lack” or “something missing.” Examples of this are when Saul noted that David was missing,<sup>3</sup> or when it says that no soldiers were missing (לֹא נִפְקַד).<sup>4</sup> This is related certainly to “counting” since when you count you note if something is missing, but in any case the Radak writes that it is a separate meaning.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 50:21.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 20:25.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 31:49.

## Pakad as a deposit

Finally, the sixth meaning is an item given as “a deposit” (פְּקֻדִין). It could be given for instance for someone to watch over, to keep safe, etc. The chapter of the tractate Baba Metzi’a called Hamafkid is one of the first pieces of gemara that most children learn.

## Depositing the Jewish people in the land of Babylon

Let’s return to the verse about Babylon, which is connoted Pekod. The sages say that Babylon is so-called because the Jewish people were placed there like a deposit, for safekeeping, until God remembers us for the good and claims us redeeming us from exile. There is a verse that states that “to Babylon they will be taken and there they will remain until the day that I remember them”<sup>5</sup> (בְּבִלְהָ יִבְאוּ וְשָׁמָּה יִהְיוּ עַד יוֹם פְּקֻדֵי אֲתָם). But, in the meantime they are like a deposit that can’t be withdrawn without the owner’s consent. The Radak describes this as being placed and hidden (הַנְּחָה וְגִנִּיזָה).

Let’s look at this phrase, “to Babylon they will be taken and there they will remain until the day that I remember them” (בְּבִלְהָ יִבְאוּ וְשָׁמָּה יִהְיוּ עַד יוֹם פְּקֻדֵי אֲתָם), a little closer. It has 7 words and 26 letters. Its value is 770. What did the Lubavitcher Rebbe call the Lubavitch headquarter at 770 Eastern Parkway? He called it “the house of our Rebbe in Babylon” (בֵּית רַבֵּינוּ שְׁבַבְבֵּל).

The sages disagree about whether this verse indicates that in our times we are allowed to leave Babylon and return to the land of Israel. Rav Yehudah forbade his students from leaving Babylon. Specifically, he forbade Rabbi Zeira to return to the land of Israel. He understood that it was only the Almighty’s task to take us out of Babylon. Still, Rabbi Zeira, left Babylon and moved to the land of Israel. He even fasted 100 days in order to forget the Babylonian Talmud he had learnt his entire life in order to have a clean slate for learning the Jerusalem Talmud, the Talmud of the land of Israel. Indeed, the Lubavitcher Rebbe followed the prohibition in this verse and did not make *aliyah* to the land of Israel. 770 is also the value of “the house of Mashiach” (בֵּית מְשִׁיחַ), and equal to 10 times mazal (מזל).

## The distinct roles of the Torah’s revealed and concealed dimensions

These then are the 6 meanings of this root, פקד. We changed their order from that which the Radak brings them in, because we want to correspond them to the *sefirot*. It is important to know that the role of the revealed dimension of the Torah is to define, distinguish, and divide between things (לחלק). But the role of the Torah’s concealed dimension is to unite things.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 27:22.

## **The ray of light permeating life's emptiness**

When God contracted His infinite light and created a void in which all the worlds would be created, He then introduced a ray of infinite light that permeates the void. This ray of light is the secret of the Torah. Around this ray of light all the worlds were created.

We can immediately explain then that if there is some void in my life—life easily becomes empty because the value of “life” (חיים) is also the life of “emptiness” (חלל)—I need to bring a ray of light into them, and that ray of light that will fill my life is Torah. The same is true not only of the individual, but of the community in general. If the community feels empty and lacking purpose, the Torah can fill it. But, the ray is not enough. The ray has to create worlds in the void, it has to create many institutions and a system—all that a modern state needs to run.

## **The ray of light's inner and external dimensions**

The ray of light has both an inner and an external dimension. The external dimension creates division—it is the revealed dimension of the Torah. Each aspect is revealed to be something different, just like every individual has a special role to play. But, the ray's inner dimension creates a state of inter-inclusion between the various aspects.

When someone like the Radak reflects on a root, like Pakod, and then discovers that it has many distinct and different meanings by researching the entire Bible and finding these different meanings, he causes division between the different meanings, the different aspects found in this one root. This is of course the way of Torah learning. First of all the mind has to be sharpened by finding the differences, by clearly defining each aspect and understanding the differences between them. But, the Radak stops there. He doesn't try to unite the different meaning after he's separated them into their distinct aspects.

The mind's role is to differentiate. If you look at something and the only thing you can see is that everything is the same, that all the parts are equal, that is not correct. The same is true when thinking of communal issues, issues that affect the public. If right away everything seems the same and equal to you—that is simply nothing. Equality without difference is worth very little. Equality is only worth something when it is used to unite a reality that is already full of separation and differences. That is why if someone learns the Torah's revealed dimension without the inner dimension is missing the main thing.

To unite things that are disparate, that are distinct and separate, we have to find a model that matches the different things and puts them under a single framework. When that is done, the disparate elements become like the different organs in our body.

Though they are separate and distinct, they work together; all are needed for the body to fully function as a whole.

That is why we mentioned the six meanings in the order we did, in an order that corresponds them to the six days of creation and the six sefirot that they represent, from loving-kindness to foundation. Let's see the correspondence in short:

### **Loving-kindness: the gift of an appointment, winning the ba'al teshuvah contract**

To appoint someone to a certain role, as we said, is to fill his hands. You have to understand that to be given a role is to be given a gift from heaven. If you don't have a role you are nebech. It's very difficult and your life feels like one big void, because, no one has outstretched his hand to give you a role. Again, a role is given—it should be considered a gift. And a gift of course corresponds to chesed, loving-kindness. Like the Torah that God gave us from His right-hand as it were (מימינו אש דת למו)

There is a saying from the sages that everyday a voice sounds from Heaven saying, "Return wayward sons." With our ears we can't hear it, but our soul does hear it. This voice calls us to become *ba'alei teshuvah*. Today we would say that in heaven they are putting out a contract, and anyone can try and win the contract. The contract asks: Who is going to merit to be a *ba'al teshuvah*, because to be a *ba'al teshuvah* is a role. If you don't get the role, you've lost, because it's an important role. In this world people argue over contracts. There's a lot to say about this understanding of heaven's call as a contract being offered to everyone. The mother for instance at home has a role, and it is all loving-kindness.

### **Might: the chamber of merit**

The second meaning, remembering with an inner awakening to act, the Radak calls "providence" (השגחה). The act could be for better or for worse. In the first time that this root is mentioned, the verse begins with the word, "And *Havayah*" (והוי). Why the additional "and" at the word's beginning? The sages explain that whenever the Torah uses this construct it does indeed refer to something additional, that it was God together with His heavenly court of judgment.

The *sefirot* correspond to what are known as chambers (היכלות). The *sefirah* of might (*gevurah*) is also called the "chamber of merit" (היכל הניבות). So we will correspond this meaning with the *sefirah* of might (or judgment), *gevurah*. We read this verse on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, the day of judgment (יום הדין), on which God judges the entire world. The awakening that accompanies this recollection is also related to *gevurah*. It is explained in Chassidut that all awakening in the psyche requires the *sefirah* of might. To cause anything to happen, to act, requires might. Action requires might, and one who

doesn't have might will never do anything in life, he lacks awakening. This is another reason to correspond this meaning with might.

### **The sin of the golden calf: instructing the community to do teshuvah**

This Shabbat we will also read *parashat Shekalim*. There is something special in a year like ours with 13 months because we read *Shekalim* on the same Shabbat as *Pekudei*. *Shekalim* is taken from the beginning of *Ki Tisa* which is also all about “recollection,” and counting. The half shekel is given to allow the congregation as a whole to atone, to do *teshuvah*. What were they atoning for? The sages explain that the Jewish people were not liable for the sin of the Golden Calf, and so even before they sinned, God taught them to atone for it: God brings the cure before the malady.

So why did the people sin, if they were not liable to transgress in this way? The sages explain that they sinned in order to show and instruct us that an entire congregation can do teshuvah, can repent. There is a way back for even an entire people. The same is true regarding King David, whom the sages say was not liable to sin with Batsheva. So why did he? In order to teach the individual that *teshuvah* is always possible.

Still, there is a punishment for the sin of the Golden Calf, and every time we do something wrong as a community, a little bit of that punishment is administered to us.

### **The root Pakad in parashat Shekalim**

The root פקד appears 3 times, and then 2 more times in the rest of the verses of *parashat Shekalim*. In the first verse of *Pekudei*, the root פקד appears only twice. Rabbeinu Of the 3 times it appears in the first verse, twice it is the exact same phrase, בפקד אתם. Rabbeinu Bechayei points out that though the phrase repeats twice, it means something different each time. Each time it refers to a different meaning of the root Pakad. The verse should therefore be read as, “When you take a census of the Jewish people, by number, each man shall give God a ransom for his soul when they are counted, and there will not be a plague among them when they are remembered”<sup>6</sup> (כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו לה' בפקד אתם ולא יהיה בהם נגף בפקד אתם). The first time, the phrase means “when they are counted,” but the second time it means “when they are remembered.”

He explains that the point of counting the people with the half shekels was to prevent anything negative from happening to them (when you count people, you should do so indirectly). Then, once the half shekels have been given, God still remembers each individual, and that can be a cause for judgment. But, since they have been counted indirectly with the half-shekels, they will not be judged harshly or negatively. He likens

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 30:12.

this to the Shunamite women who made an attic room for Elisha the prophet, and whenever he was there he stayed in that attic room. Elisha therefore asked her whether she needed him to talk to the king about any issues she had. But, she said, I have no need of intervention with the king, "I sit amongst my people." Rabbeinu Bechayei explains that a person is comfortable when he is annulled and part of a community, and its better for him that the king not know about his individual existence. Whenever the king knows about an individual that is already judgment. It is better not to be known to the king at all. Even if the king will initially do something good for the person, it's better in the end to remain anonymous.

First of all, this is feminine wisdom: don't stand out. To be known is to stick out, to have a protrusion (בְּלִיטָה). Chassidim are against sticking-out. Women know this best because their nature is כָּל כְּבוֹדָה בַּת מְלֶךְ פְּנִימָה, they are innately reticent and modest. So the same is true about the first verse of *Shekalim*: on the one hand each individual is counted, on the other it is all anonymously.

### **Beauty: "the commandments of God are just, they bring joy to the heart"**

The third meaning was "a commandment," a mitzvah. The Torah and the mitzvot correspond to tiferet, beauty. In general, as we said, "the commandments of God are just, they bring joy to the heart" (פְּקֻדֵי ה' יִשְׂרָאֵל מְשֻׁמְחֵי לֵב), justice (יִשְׁרָ), being straight in the heart is in beauty, in *tiferet*. In Kabbalah, this is also related to joy, since the foundation of the mother (who is joy) ends in the *sefirah* of *tiferet*.

### **Victory and Acknowledgment: Counting and lack**

What about counting and "lack," the fourth and fifth meanings. We said before that counting reveals lack too. This is the same as the relationship between victory and acknowledgment. The Arizal specifically notes that the words, "everyone who will be counted" (כָּל הָעֶבֶר עַל הַפְּקָדִים) refer to the *sefirot* of victory and acknowledgment. The counting of the Jewish people many times happens after a calamity, by counting it is also revealed how many are missing. Hod (acknowledgment) is about lack, like הוֹדֵי הַפֶּדָה עָלַי לְמִשְׁחִית.

### **Foundation: safekeeping for kingdom**

Now regarding a deposit (פְּקָדוֹן), the Arizal explicitly mentions that it relates to foundation. The first time this word appears in the Torah is when Yosef collects all the food in Egypt. He explains that the land (of Egypt) is malchut, while the collateral that was collected is the energy from the five judgments (הַ גְּבוּרֹת) from loving-kindness to acknowledgment that are deposited in foundation and will eventually be given to the earth/kingdom.

The three times that the root פקד appears in the Torah it is with a prefix letter: לַפְקֹדִים, בְּפִקְדוֹן, and הַפְקֹדִים, the prefix letters spell “vapor” (הֶבֶל). The secret of the deposit is related to vapor. Foundation is of course Yosef himself, and what he collected, the bounty he collected and deposited in his storehouses is sometimes called הֶבֶל.

So we’ve quickly surveyed the six meanings of the root פקד, and how they correspond to the six *sefirot* from loving-kindness to foundation. Once we have this model in place, it makes it very easy to connect the meanings together. Our goal here is to take the meaning of פקד as role and see how it relates and appears in each of these other meanings. The main thing we want to understand is how everything is about finding our role and to take a way a message and a directive about our role as a community of Jews living today, here in the land of Israel.