

P'kudei

Marissa Fierston

Shabbat shalom

I'm Marissa Fierston and my parsha is *P'kudei*. I am also reading a special maftir for *Shabbat Shekalim*. The reason I have 2 portions is because today is a special Shabbat. *Shabbat Shekalim* is the first of four special *Shabbatot*. The reason that we are reading this one is in preparation for Pesach.

In *Shekalim*, it talks about how every person over the age of 20 needs to pay one *shekel* when entering the tabernacle for services. Half a shekel goes to the temple and the other half goes to G-d as a thank you. A shekel is a form of money. When I was looking at this parsha I was wondering why is the age 20? In the Jewish religion, 13 is the time you become an adult. So why is the age 20? I soon learned that age 20 also has a very important meaning. This is the age when men had to join the army. I could never imagine that.

The other parsha I have is *P'kudei*. In the story, it says that Moses counted everything that went into making the tabernacle. This is how he knew where everything was going and if he had enough of it. Everyone contributed a little bit of materials and in the end it all added up.

Not only should we account for the things we donate, but we should take into account all the talents we have. Moses did not build everything himself. People used the talents they had to help. I think this is an important lesson for everyone. We should all try to use our talents more often. Even though we don't have a tabernacle to build today, it is a good challenge, for everyone, to try and use their talents, to contribute to the community.

For my bat mitzvah projects, I used two of my talents which are a love for swimming and being with people. On Wednesday afternoons, I go to the JCC and help out in a swim

class with little kids. I have been teaching them for a long time, and I can really see the changes in their attitude. At first, they were a little nervous and they would grab on to me. Now you can tell that they really trust me. The kids learned how to kick, scoop, and blow bubbles. In the end, they put it all together, to swim. I think learning how to swim ties in with me and my bat mitzvah studies because, when I was learning everything, I had to do it in steps. When it was time, I had to put it all together to what you are seeing today.

My mitzvah projects did not stop there. I also am volunteering at the Hebrew Home. I love to visit the residents. I help make their stay as pleasurable as possible by playing games and talking with them. When we play, they are always smiling. That is what it is all about at the end of the day.

Both my projects have to do with helping people. I think, as a Jewish community, we have survived so long by helping each other. When I helped the older people in the community, I learned a lot about my background and some things I did not know. When helping the younger kids, I was able to teach them. It is always an experience, no matter who you help. As a Jewish person, I feel the need to keep traditions going by not only learning, but teaching too.

I would like to take a moment to thank several important people who have helped me on this journey. First, I would like to thank everyone at the Emanuel. Mr. Pinchover for teaching me all of my torah portions, Mrs. Manheim for tutoring me and helping me learn several prayers, and Mrs. Fox and Rabbi Small, for helping me write this d'var Torah. I would not have been able to do this without your help and support. To my friends and family, for encouraging me, and really pushing me to do my best. Most of all, but definitely not least, my Mom, Dad, and Nate. I would not be here without all of your help and support. Thank you!!!!

Please open and turn to page 564 in the big red book called the Etz Hayyim Humash as I chant the first aliyah.