

Message from the Haftara

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When Giving Becomes a Partnership

SH'KALIM

This week's D'var Torah is dedicated to my colleague and mentor, David Katz, whose generosity of spirit and deep engagement with our friends and funders truly personify the message of this week's haftara.

This week's haftara echoes the maftir of Parshat Sh'kalim in its focus on communal responsibility and shared investment. The maftir, read from the beginning of Parshat Ki Tisa, describes the half-shekel donation every Israelite was required to give toward the Mishkan that would soon be built in the wilderness. The haftara, taken from the Book of M'lachim Bet (ch. 12), recounts a similar process undertaken many generations later to provide for the maintenance of the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem. Yet here we encounter a striking paradigm shift regarding the fundraising process that provides valuable insight into how Jewish institutions are best built and sustained.

In this story, we are informed that in the later days of the Davidic dynasty, the Beit HaMikdash had fallen into disrepair. The young king, Yeho'ash, turns to the kohanim charged with its care and instructs them to collect the funds that regularly arrived at the Beit HaMikdash - whether through the half-shekel obligations or through voluntary donations - and to also proactively seek additional support. These funds, emphasized Yeho'ash, must be directed toward repairing the breaches in the Temple's structure and renovating the entire building.

Soon, however, Yeho'ash realizes that the capital project has not moved forward. He summons the kohanim to understand the delay and quickly understands that their role as collectors and intermediaries is unintentionally discouraging potential donors by requesting money without clearly explaining how it would be used. Together with Yeho'yada the Kohen Gadol, he decides instead to place a charity box next to the altar in the Temple courtyard, allowing people to contribute directly and without the kohen's solicitation.

The impact is immediate. Once the process shifts from top-down to bottom-up collection, the Temple's coffers begin to fill. By removing an ineffective intermediary, potential donors regain a sense of trust and

ownership. When people are empowered to give freely and directly they are far more willing to contribute generously.

This insight into friend-raising and fundraising remains relevant to this day. Donations given by individuals from personal initiative tend to be more generous and sustainable than those given in response to top-down requests. When people are invited to participate in a vision rather than being asked merely to fund it, they respond with enthusiasm and commitment.

We see this dynamic today, within our own institutions. Whether engaging parents and students in our schools or cultivating relationships with our supporters, success flows when we include, listen, accept feedback, and form genuine partnership. When individuals feel that their voices matter and that they are helping shape a shared dream, they often choose to increase their support, and become invaluable allies.

The haftara goes even further, reminding us that meaningful contribution is not limited to financial support alone. With creativity and motivation, people can give in ways that are “outside the charity box”, through their time and/or creativity. Indeed, the text notes that “No silver bowls, shears, basins, or trumpets - or any golden or silver vessels - were

made from the money that was brought to the House of the Lord” (12:14). The artisans who crafted these items were so invested in the sacred project that they donated their work outright. Their reward was the privilege of being part of the process.

Lasting institutions are built not through transactions, but through trust. When funders, friends and community members are welcomed as true partners, shaping vision, sharing ideas and contributing their financial, creative, spiritual, and intellectual capabilities, authentic partnerships emerge. From those partnerships, resilient organizations, programs and communities grow, capable of achieving far more together and leaving a stronger impact than any could alone. 