

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



T'RUMA

I Am What I Own

This week we begin reading the Torah portions about the construction of the MISHKAN, the portable Temple of the Desert years. There's so much to discuss about the sublime symbolism incorporated into the fashioning of this religious site, but this week's reading begins with a topic most of us can identify with, namely institutional fundraising.

Personally, I've always hated fundraising, but I've worked for a few masters of the art, so I was rarely called on to help. One such individual once told me: Fundraising is really easy; all you have to do is believe that what you're doing is the most important thing in the world.

Okay! I've been teaching Torah for over a half century, and I have found it immensely important and rewarding. But is it the most important thing in the world? I mean there are people out there feeding the hungry, curing the ill and pulling disaster victims out of rubble. So, teaching is pretty important, but the MOST important job in the universe? Probably not.

So, God uses a different tack. Our salient verse states: Tell the Israelite

people to take for Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart is so moved (Sh'mot 25:2).

Seems like a pretty soft sell. Collect on My behalf contributions from those who want to give. In my limited experience most people don't 'want' to give. In general, we are takers, when given the chance.

Actually, most commentators agree that God went out of the way to insist that this whole enterprise must be voluntary. Now there are compulsory payments in Judaism, like the MACHATZIT HASHEKEL we read about last Shabbat, but the 'Mishkan Building Fund' wasn't one of them.

Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, I believe, was dealing with this issue of volunteerism in his comment on this verse. He emphasized two critical terms in our verse: T'RUMA (translated 'offering', 'gift' or 'contribution') and YI-D'VENU ('freely given' or 'generously given'). He emphasized that God wanted generous gifts from the heart. We must measure generosity from the size of one's heart, not the size of one's bank account or stock portfolio.

There's a great scene in the classic movie *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) in which Yul Brynner is the head of a group (7, duh!) of hired guns who commit to protect a poor Mexican town from bandits. The peasants

offer him their grain, which they 'describe as 'everything we own'. Yul Brynner's character, Chris Adams responds: Well, I've been offered a lot for my work... but never everything!

That's the concept being presented in our verse. It must be motivated by a generous spirit, not any other motivating factor. The Malbim says specifically: "For Me" - for My sake; that one should not mix into his intention any ulterior motive, such as honor or glory for his donation, or in order to receive reward, but solely for the sake of God.

The Malbim also emphasizes the democratic nature of these donations. He adds: 'From every man' - Thus, by saying 'from every man', it indicates that the giver possesses free will and choice, and gives with a good heart, not because others pressure him or because he gives out of embarrassment, and the like. So that they should not think this donation would be taken only from the wealthy or the leaders of the community, it says, 'from every man'. Every person counts.

Clearly, there are to be no brass donor recognition plaques in the Mishkan.

Rabbeinu Bechaye customarily begins Torah readings with a quote from the book of Mishlei. He chose these verses very carefully to reflect a central issue in the upcoming

parsha. This week he chose: Accept My discipline instead of silver; accept knowledge instead of gold (Mishlei 8:10). He is letting us know that the Jews who gave of their wealth taken from Egypt to the Mishkan Building Fund, got a good deal.

He begins his explanation of the verse with the expected ideas: Torah values are good both here and in the World to Come, wealth is potentially very destructive and causes worries and concerns. But then he really gets going:

The reason Shlomo employed the word K'CHU for the acquisition of ethical imperatives is that just as material benefits are acquired by the owner 'taking' them, so a similar effort is required to obtain proficiency in Torah knowledge and for the diligent student to embrace its ethics. Anyone displaying laziness in his acquisition of Torah is liable to punishment even if he observes the relevant commandment... The same applies to people who say their prayers regularly, but as a form of routine.

We've already discussed the terms T'RUMA and YI-D'VENU in our verse. Rabbeinu Bechaye adds the significance of the V'YIKCHU, which means 'and they will take'. Even though we're discussing giving. Some authorities explain that when you give a gift to a great personage it is such an

honor when they accept it, especially God, that the supposed 'giver' is really the receiver. So, we're getting more than we're giving.

However, Rabbeinu Bechaye is adding another wrinkle to the idea, which is: One must make an effort for a gift to be worthy.

Our donations and service to God are only of value, if we put in the effort to make them grand. This is especially true in the areas of Torah study and T'FILA.

The Kedushat Levi adds another ingredient and layer to our discussion. He emphasizes the use of the word LIBO (one's heart) in our verse. The great Chasidic authority explains that including the heart in our equation emphasizes the link between the generous thought and the generous deed. It's the LEV which forms that connection between the brain and the hand.

I hate to disappoint the many fundraisers out there, but a careful analysis of our very famous verse (quoted often by fundraisers) leads us to the conclusion: It is not the size of the gift that matters most, but the heart of the giver embodied within it.

