"*Terumah*: An appeal with limited donors"

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A strange aspect of the mitzvah of contributing to the Mishkan, the desert sanctuary, is that it was left to the good will of the individual as to whether he or she wished to contribute. This is unique among the mitzvot of the Torah, which, as the term 'mitzvah' suggests, are divine 'instructions,' not arbitrary recommendations! As a project that God had initiated, to enable Him to dwell among His people, would we not have expected an obligatory national levy along the lines of the half-shekel census (Ex. 30:11-16)?

Now, Rashi states that, although the instruction to build the Mishkan appears in today's sidrah, and the episode of the Golden Calf is related only later in the sidrah *Ki Tissa*, yet, chronologically, the sin of the Golden Calf actually preceded the erection of the Mishkan. That idolatrous act had destroyed the relationship between God and his people and had alienated them from their Father in heaven. So, the subsequent command, to build the Mishkan, was, in effect, a divine gesture of reconciliation, an invitation to Israel to put the past behind them and to build a home for Him in their very midst, a home that - *Veshachanti betocham* – His spirit would inhabit and invigorate (v.8).

That intrinsic connection between the sin of the Golden Calf and the building of the Mishkan might also explain why God allowed only Aaron and members of his Levite tribe to undertake administrative and spiritual duties within it. For that tribe was the only one that had not compromised its faith by worshipping the Calf (see Ex.32:26).

This invitation to contribute gold, silver, brass, and coloured fabrics, toward the Mishkan was clearly more than an ordinary charitable appeal. It was an invitation to participate in a powerful affirmation of faith in God, and a demonstration of a longing for His proximity to all Israel.

Such an invitation could clearly not have been extended to the entire nation since the majority would still have been burdened by guilt at its act of Calf idolatry. Indeed, for centuries to come the Israelites were unable to resist the seductive influence of idolatry, as evinced by the fact that, some 800 years later, Ezekiel was still denouncing the people for 'profaning God's holy name by bringing their idolatrous gifts' (20:39). In their minds, even the valuables in their possession that they had 'borrowed' from the Egyptians would have retained a strong association with the gods of Egypt, given that they had been obtained from their idolatrous Egyptian neighbours (See Ex. 12:35-36).

This, I suggest, may account for why God initially employed the word *veyish'alu,* 'they shall *borrow*, each from his Egyptian neighbour' (11:2), rather than *veyik'chu*, 'they shall *take,*' which would have been a far more accurate term given the circumstances. When one 'takes' something, one psychologically absorbs it into the amorphous determination of one's possessions. When one 'borrows' something, on the other hand, one mentally ring-fences it. Even if its return is delayed for years, it retains its subliminal association with the owner's property. By instructing the Hebrews to 'borrow' those valuables from their neighbours, God was indicating that those valuables would never, in fact, entirely lose their original idolatrous association, but would retain the capacity to engender such thoughts unless the objects were re-directed and reconsecrated to a higher purpose.

Had the appeal for donations been open to the entire nation, many would inevitably have utilised those borrowed Egyptian valuables as their donation towards the making and furnishing of the Mishkan, which would have been wholly inappropriate.

I am inclined, therefore, to render the instruction to accept the gifts - *me'eit kol ish asher yidvenu libbo* (v. 2) - not in its literal sense, 'from every person whose heart is willing (to contribute),' but as, '*only* from those whose hearts are *wholly committed* [*to Me*].'[1] This was

intended to rule out as donors those whose idolatrous sympathies had drawn them into the worship of the Golden Calf. Their confused dualistic affiliation meant that much of the fabric and items of jewellery that they donated would have retained in their minds an association with the beliefs and practices of their idolatrous Egyptian neighbours whom they would have seen adorned with them as they left their homes to participate in the performance of their multifarious Egyptian rituals and festivals. It goes without saying that only the ritually-unencumbered property of a *nediv lev*, a truly faithful Israelite, could become transformed and elevated into use as furnishings for the Mishkan, the abode of the one God.

We may now appreciate why those donations to the Mishkan had to be restricted to those - *asher yidvenu libbo* - who were confident of their 'whole-hearted devotion' to God, and who had never entertained any tincture of sympathy for idolatry and its adherents.

That donor restriction reflects the fact that one cannot command faith, nor can one impose commitment. It is a rare commodity. Some are sensitive to it already in their early years and retain it throughout their lives; others, due to a variety of circumstances and influences, may subsequently reject it; while many spiritually-insensitive people never come under its spell.

The Hebrew word for 'faith' is *emunah*, with its adverb, *Amen.* Like 'Amen,' faith is a response, either to the needs and urges of one's inner psyche, or to the beliefs and values of one's upbringing, or as a response to a eureka moment, or the persuasion and expectation of a charismatic teacher or spiritual guru. It was left to the conscience of the individual Israelite to determine whether this was an appeal to which he or she could, 'in good faith' respond.

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While it may seem a straightforward matter for the individual Israelite to assess the purity of his own faith before determining whether it was appropriate for him to donate materials for use in the Sanctuary, it was, I would suggest, a revolutionary notion at that time.
While we may take for granted our ability to undertake self-analysis – or, more frequently, to do so with the help of a counsellor or therapist, and to understand more clearly thereby the source of any emotional turbulence that we may be suffering - we do so with the benefit of our ability to draw on psychology as a reputable and developed biological and social science. Indeed, much of Freud's psychoanalytic theory evolved from his own forays into self-analysis which he describes in his path-finding work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). He accordingly regarded the ability to undertake self-analysis as an essential prerequisite for the practice of clinical psychology. For the ancient Israelites, however, such self-exploration would have been an almost impossible undertaking.

It is one thing to conduct a superficial exploration of one's motivation in regard to a particular act, but to determine the nature of one's character, the quality of one's emotions, and one's attitude to life and to aspects of human interaction – in other words, to assess whether one was truly a *nediv lev* - is quite another matter.

One of the Torah's main objectives, however, was to implant into its adherents values that were calculated to shape their character to the extent that morality and ethics became second nature. Thus, R. Akivah highlighted loving one's neighbour as oneself as 'a fundamental principle of the Torah.' Hence, the frequent repetition of the laws governing charity and consideration for 'the orphan, the widow, and the stranger within your gates'; lending practical and financial support to one's neighbour; consideration for the less fortunate as

reflected in the law requiring one to grant one's workers a day of Shabbat rest; paying a hired man his daily wage without any delay, etc. etc.

The *nediv lev* is thus not only 'whole-hearted' with God, but also with man. And one who converts such ethical behaviour into a consistent way-of-life is able to use such considerations as the measuring-rod of whether or not he or she is living up to what is required of the *nediv lev*.

But, the Torah went further and codified as law that way of life: **תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ** - 'Be whole-hearted with your God' (Deut. 18:13). It even got close to the notion of self-scrutiny when legislating for one's frame of mind. Hence, **לֹא תִשְׂנָא אֶת אָחִיךָ בִּלְבָבֶךָ** – 'Do not hate your enemy *in your heart*' (Lev. 19:17). Add to this the dedication of an annual day of awe, Yom Kippur, specifically for meditation, self-analysis, expression of remorse and reconciliation.

Later Judaism laid even greater emphasis on self-analysis, with the classical prophet Joel calling on the nation to 'rend their hearts rather than their clothes' (Joel 2:13) and the writer of the book of Proverbs enumerating the particular values that Judaism expects one to embrace. The emphasis of Judaism on ethics is exemplified by the startling statement of the Talmud that the destruction of the second Temple was due to the fact that there was widespread enmity among Jews; and this perspective was responsible for the fast day of Tisha B'Av evolving into a day of national *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, self-assessment.

The 11th century saw the publication of works, such as Bahya ibn Paquda's *Chovot Ha-levavot* ('Duties of the heart'), specifically devoted to the subject of *musar*, ethical conduct; and, as its name suggests, the premise that the way a Jew feels, thinks, behaves, and relates to

God and fellowman are as important in the eyes of God as ritual laws. Such a perspective inspired the rise of 'The musar movement' that developed in 19th century Lithuania, and that is associated with the name of Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin Salanter (1810–1883).

Thus, the dual prerequisites - the ability to self-scrutinise, on the one hand, and to offer oneself, in a spirit of true humility, as one possessed of religious whole-heartedness, on the other - must have ensured that the number of donors of materials for the building and furnishing of the Mishkan was seriously circumscribed!

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1. The Hebrew phrase *nadav lev*, employed regularly in the sense of 'to contribute willingly,' is also found in the emotional sense we are suggesting, namely 'to *be* whole-hearted; committed in love.' It is found in this sense in the phrase אהבם נדבה, 'I love them whole-heartedly' (Hosea 14:5). The dual attribute, כל איש אשר נשאו לבו וכל אשר ***נדבה*** ***רוחו*** - 'every man whose heart inspired him and everyone **whose spirit moved him' (Ex. 35:21) –** similarly denotes an attribute of heart rather than merely a willingness to contribute.

Shabbat shalom,

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