

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Vayakhel Pikudei

True Standard

The Jewish people gave donations lovingly when it came to building the Mishkan, Tabernacle. The verse (Shemot 35:21) describes this as: "...everyone whose generosity of spirit moved him brought a portion for Hashem for the work of the Tent of Meeting..." There is one simple and compelling question on this verse. The word 'unto him,' seems unnecessary, could it not have just as easily been omitted? The Torah does not use extra words and the context of the verse make the word 'unto him,' highly unnecessary.

The Way We Operate

The K'tav Sofer (Rabbi Avraham Shmuel B. Sofer, 1815- 1871, son of Chatam Sofer) reveals a fascinating point here. He explains that human nature dictates that before one gives his money away to charity, he looks first at the amount that someone richer than him gave. When he sees the rich man's sum, he calculates and says to himself: I am not as rich as him and so I should give less! This is the way people think before parting with their hard-earned cash.

However, the person who is idealistic and recognizes that God granted him wealth in order to share it with others and to promote great causes; operates with a very different perspective. When determining how much charity to give, one decides for himself how strongly he feels for the cause and then calculates how much he is able to responsibly contribute.



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Building a Mishkan

The verse here testifies that in the giving of donations for the Mishkan the idealistic approach was followed. Each individual calculated for himself the appropriate amount that he could give without comparing himself to others. This is expressed by the extra word “him.” Each person gave according to what his own heart determined, and not what his friend’s heart established as the standard! A great lesson indeed. I would like to develop this point further.

Going through life, this principle is fundamental to remember. It is easy to look around at the degradation of the world around us and say, “Wow, what an evil world we live in! But at least I am better than them, so I have nothing more to strive for”. We can even look around within our own circles and point to others whose sense of morality is far below our own. This can have a negative effect on our own sense of truth and ethics. We therefore strive to maintain a standard that challenges us to live up to our personal potential. Our goal and perspective is to be the best person that we can be irrespective of what others think or do. This is how the Mishkan was built thousands of years ago, and this is the perspective of great and productive people.

Shabbat Shalom!

