

GOING THE EXTRA SMILE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Building a sanctuary is difficult enough. Getting people to donate has been, historically, even more difficult. That, however, was not the case concerning the *Mishkan*. The Torah in this week's portion tells us that everyone contributed to the cause. Men and women brought gold and silver. They brought personal items and family items. Copper mirrors were donated as well as bracelets, bangles and baubles. Those who had wool and linen came and those who had dyes donated.

Before the pledges began arriving, the *Nesseim* (the heads of the tribes) were so confident that the goals would not be met, that they pledged to fill the gap of any missing funds. They were shocked to learn that there was almost nothing for them to contribute! So much of every item was donated that an announcement was made, ordering the entire nation to halt their generosity. (It may have been the first and last of its kind!)

But what interests me is one other group of people that the Torah mentions as contributors. "And all those who Hashem inspired with wisdom to do the work. They took in front of Moshe the donations that the Jews brought for the work of the *Mishkan*, and the brought an additional offering each morning" (Exodus 36:2-4).

Why did the Torah single out that these people brought something to the *Mishkan*? Didn't everybody?

The daughter of Rabbi Zusia of Anipol's was engaged. As poor as he was, *Reb* Zusia and his wife scraped together enough money for a seamstress to sew a beautiful gown for the bride-to-be. After a month the gown was ready, and Reb Zusia's wife went with her bundle of rubles to the home of the seamstress to get the finished gown.

She came home empty-handed. "Where is the gown?" asked both the Rebbe and his daughter, almost in unison.

"Well," said his wife, "I did a mitzvah. When I came to pick up the gown, I saw tears in the eyes of the seamstress. I asked her why she was crying and she told me that her daughter, too, was getting married. Then she looked at the beautiful gown that she had sewn for me and sighed, "if only we could afford such beautiful material for a gown."

Reb Zusia's wife continued. "At that moment I decided to let the seamstress have our gown as a gift!"

Reb Zusia was delighted. The mitzvah of helping a poor bride was dear to him and he longed for the opportunity to fulfill it. But he added one question to his wife. "Did you pay her for the work she did for us?"

"Pay her?" asked the wife, "I gave her the gown!"

"I'm sorry," said the *Rebbe*. "You told me the gown was a gift. We still owe her for the weeks of work she spent for us." The *rebbeitzen* agreed and, in addition to the gift of the gown she compensated the seamstress for her work.

The men and women who toiled laboriously could have said that they had done their share. After all, they crafted and wove the beautiful utensils and tapestries of the *Mishkan*. Yet that was not enough for them. In addition to the work they did, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1786-1829) explains, they contributed too! They did not stop their commitment with their work for the Mishkan. The Torah tells us that *they, too*, gave each morning. The efforts of individuals were crowned by their relentless generosity. In addition to their time and their skills, they gave their possessions. In a generation that looks to abdicate responsibility and commitment, it is wonderful to read about men and women who searched for more ways to give -- and found them! **Good Shabbos** ©1997 Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

Dedicated in memory of George Fisch by Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Fisch

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