

THE GIFT OF DESPERATION

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe summoned Bezalel, Oheliab, and every wise-hearted man whose heart HASHEM endowed with wisdom, every one whose heart inspired him, to approach the work, to do it. From Moshe's presence they took the entire gift that the Children of Israel had brought for the work for the labor of the Sanctuary, to do it. But they continued to bring him free-willed gifts morning after morning. All the wise people came- those performing all the sacred work, each of them from the work that they were doing- and they said to Moshe as follows, "The people are bringing more than enough for the labor of the work that HASHEM has commanded to perform." Moshe commanded that they proclaim throughout the camp saying, "Man and woman shall not do more work toward the gift for the Sanctuary!" And the people were restrained from bringing. But the work had been enough for all the work, to do it- and there was extra. (Shemos 36:2-7)

The appeal for talent and resources to make the Tabernacle was so successful that two things happened that may never have occurred before in history and may never again be repeated. 1) There was more than enough material and money donated and there was even extra. 2) The people collecting the money and materials actually protested that more than enough had been donated already.

Was it a good thing or a bad thing that people brought more than was needed and that they had to be restrained even after Moshe's proclamation to halt? Why was it necessary to restrain people from giving if they wish to give? Is there any value to the latecomers' delayed goodwill? Are their good intentions dear to HASHEM just as the timely donations? If it was late but pleasing or too late, either way, what was their gift?

Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos a neighbor related to me a happening, a striking phenomena he had witness one just a few days earlier soon after the conclusion of the Yom Kippur service. He had been hired that year for the High Holy Days to be the Rabbi of a small Synagogue in lower Manhattan. The Yom Kippur service was finished and the meal after the fast had been served. He was making his last final rounds with a security guard before locking up and heading back to the suburbs. As they stood outside of the now locked Shul a secular appearing young woman approached frantically asking them if today was in fact Yom Kippur.

The Rabbi nodded affirmatively and that sent the woman into a near state of hysteria. She rattled the locked door in desperation and the security guard reminded her that it was over already and the service had ended long ago. She wouldn't take "no" for an answer. She insisted on being allowed to

enter the building. The Rabbi gave an approving nod to the guard who promptly unlocked the door. The woman ran into the now quiet and dimly lit sanctuary and threw herself upon the floor sobbing uncontrollably. After a fit of belated tears she straightened herself out and calmly exited the building disappearing into the city night.

My friend was stirred and disturbed by the incident. We discussed whether her outburst of regret about having spaced out and missed Yom Kippur was a case of too little too late or whether it had some supernal worth. Given the natural limits that come along with being garmented in physical bodies we agreed that it was beyond our ken and so we left it a question.

We could only guess that she had failed to observe Yom Kippur that year and that was an irreparable fact of life. However if the goal of Yom Kippur in specific and all Mitzvos in general is to reach the heart, and "HASHEM wants the heart", then any gesture offered even after the fact, is still worthy beyond measure. It's a shame it had to come to this but it is also inspiring to explore how powerfully pure is **"the gift of desperation"**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.