

THE BOTTOM LINE

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

My grandfather, Nosson Yitzchak ben Tzvi Herschel, Isaac Golubitsky, passed away last Friday. This week's LifeLine is dedicated in his memory.

"G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they take an offering for me; from every man whose heart desires [to give], take my offering.'" [25:1-2]

The *Bais HaLevi*, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik of Brisk, discusses why this week's reading, *Trumah*, follows last week's reading of *Mishpatim* in the *Torah*. As we mentioned last week, *Mishpatim* describes an abundance of interpersonal laws. He explains that before a person gives charity with his money, he or she must first ensure that his or her money was acquired honestly, and not through theft or dubious business practices. If not, the "charity" will be of no benefit to the giver, meaning that it will not be considered a *Mitzvah* at all.

In the laws of *Sukkos*, we learn that one cannot use a stolen *Lulav*, referring to the palm frond taken during the holiday. If one uses a stolen *Lulav*, he has not fulfilled the *Mitzvah*, and has recited a blessing in vain. According to the *Bais HaLevi*, the law here is the same.

This is why the prophet Isaiah says ["So says **HaShem**, 'Guard judgment and do *Tzedakah*'" [56:1] (*Tzedakah* means either justice or charity), because one must first do one's business with judgment, and then give charity. Therefore, *HaShem* first gave His judgments, and only then commanded Israel to bring their donations to the Tabernacle.

Here we see the close ties between the interpersonal laws and those between man and G-d. One cannot take a stolen *Lulav* and do a *Mitzvah*. One cannot take stolen money and give it to charity. The principle is the same - and the bottom line is: one cannot steal.

Before describing the commandment to build the Tabernacle, the *Sefer HaChinuch*, the Book of (*Mitzvah*) Education, offers a preface, in which he explains the underlying reason why *HaShem* gave us His commandments: in order that we perfect and prepare ourselves to receive the great good that G-d wants to give us. He discusses this in great detail - the *Sefer HaChinuch* is available in English as well as Hebrew, and you should try to see at least a section of this in *Mitzvah* 95.

Whatever the *Mitzvah*, be it a ritual or matter of personal ethics, one should always aim for self-

improvement when doing it. And taking a *Lulav* should also make us better people, and remind us to be certain that it and the money which was used to purchase it were acquired honestly.

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.