

# HONESTY COMES FIRST

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"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.'" [Ex. 25:1-2]*

The Bais HaLevi, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik of Brisk, discusses why this week's reading follows Parshas Mishpatim in the Torah. Mishpatim describes an abundance of interpersonal laws. Our parsha, Terumah, starts off with the collection of donations for construction of the Holy Tabernacle.

The Bais HaLevi explains that there is a straightforward connection between these two parshayos. 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] While we would likely translate Tzedakah in this verse as "justice," the other meaning of the word, charity, is also accurate. Guard judgement, and do charity. First be sure to do your business with judgment, and then give charity -- for then and only then will your charity be a mitzvah!

Here we see how the interpersonal laws and those between man and G-d are intertwined. 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 -- one cannot do a mitzvah with stolen goods.

The first Mitzvah in our parsha is found in verse 8: "And they will make for me a Temple, and I will dwell among them." Before describing this Commandment, the Sefer HaChinuch, the Book of (Mitzvah) Education, explains the underlying reason for this and for all of HaShem's Commandments: in order that we perfect and prepare ourselves to receive the great good that G-d wants to give us. We must make a dwelling place upon which the Divine Presence can rest. This principle can be applied within ourselves, within our homes, within our communities (synagogues and places for Torah study), and within all Israel in the building of the Holy Temple.

Whatever the Mitzvah, be it a ritual or matter of personal ethics, this underlying goal of self-improvement should always be present. 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.  
If we do every Mitzvah with this in mind, the effects will be both rapid and profound...

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken