

GIVING CHARITABLY AND OTHERWISE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

We know that the Torah doesn't use different expressions to mean the same thing, varying them simply to make more varied reading. Our job is to find the subtle lessons in the small changes. Our *parshah* gives us a plethora of opportunities to explore differences we might gloss over.

We will name just a few. Did the people bring when "their hearts inspired them,"^[2] or merely that "which was with them?"^[3] When the ruling came down to end acceptance of further donations, the Torah expresses it as, "Man and woman should not do more work."^[4] Earlier, people were described as "bringing" their gifts. Why does it change expressions? (We might also ask why the fanfare of a public declaration, accompanied by the sounding of a *shofar*, telling people not to bring any more donations. Moshe could have quietly spread the word, or simply stopped accepting gifts, after which the message would have quickly developed feet.

There are other issues as well. The simple reading of "every man who raised up an offering"^[5] is that besides donating arm-bands, nose-rings, finger-rings, etc., they also brought some unnamed people to the collection point! Happily, we can rule out human sacrifice. So why, then, bring people?

All our questions can be resolved when we consider the various habits of charitable giving. Broadly, they fall into three groups.

The first group gives because the cause genuinely resonates with them. They don't even have to be asked to donate, but come forward on their own. They do so quietly, without anyone else having to know. It is a relatively small group.

Most people belong to a second group, of lesser stature. They are good people, but would not find it within themselves to contribute were they not asked. They do not terribly mind if their donation is publicized; some even enjoy making a public statement about their monetary strength and accomplishment.

A third group does not give if they can help it. They participate in campaigns only in response to some sort of duress.

The story unfolds with, "The entire congregation of Israel left from before Moshe."^[6] Some were excited about the opportunity to contribute to the *mishkan*. "Every person whose heart inspired him

and whose spirit moved him offered."^[7] They required no encouragement, and gave without fanfare. Next came the second group. "The men came along with the women – all who had a generous heart."^[8] They responded to the general appeal in quite a public manner – we can imagine long lines of men and women. It was enough of a spectacle that even members of the third group felt compelled to contribute as well – or were physically compelled by the others! Thus, "Every person who possessed...brought."^[9] Their spirits did not move them; their hearts did not lift them to a higher place. But they could not resist the public pressure, and they gave as well. The Torah revisits the giving, referring specifically to the second group. "All who raised up a *terumah* of silver and bronze brought..."^[10] By listening to the need and responding positively, they raised up what they donated – without compulsion. Included in this second group were the *nesi'im*, the tribal leaders who initially offered nothing, thinking that they would make up any shortfall in the public campaign – and who were criticized for this by Chazal.

Members of the first group were not naifs. They recognized that unacknowledged, private donations were easy marks for fraud. Once a system of artisans was set in motion, the especially generous ones donors did not drop off materials with the workers, fearing that anonymous donations could easily be stolen. They brought them specifically to Moshe. Even so, they tried preserving their anonymity. "They brought additional each morning,"^[11] meaning that before the fullness of the day arrived, they had dropped off items secretly, under the cloak of partial darkness. The donations passed to Moshe's personal supervision, but even he did not know the identities of the donors.

Because of these secret donors, it did not suffice to simply stop accepting donations. Moshe recognized the great desire they had to contribute, and feared that simply turning down donations would not deter these people. He reasoned that they would interpret his reluctance to his not wanting to burden those who came to him. In their passion for the cause, they would continue to bring gifts. The only way to end the secret giving was to publicly declare that all the work had been concluded! In effect, Moshe declared that the campaign been an enormous success, and its goals had been achieved. All the materials had been divvied up to the different work groups, who had performed their tasks with great skill and speed.

There was nothing left to "do,"^[12] and no further opportunity to give.

1. Based on Meleches Machsheves by R. Moshe Cheifetz, 1633-1711.
2. Shemos 35:21.
3. Shemos 35:23.
4. Shemos 36:6.
5. Shemos 35:22.
6. Shemos 35:20.

7. Shemos 35:21
8. Shemos 35:22
9. Shemos 35:23
10. Shemos 35:24
11. Shemos 36:3
12. Shemos 36:6