

EVERY LAST DROP

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

"It was on the day that Moshe finished erecting the Mishkan [Tabernacle]... And the leaders of Israel, heads of their fathers' household, brought offerings... They brought their offering before Hashem; Six covered wagons and twelve oxen - a wagon for each two leaders and an ox for each." (7:1-3)

On the first day of Nisan, the day the Tabernacle was sanctified, the leaders of the twelve tribes brought their own personal offerings in celebration of the momentous event. In addition, to help the Levi'im transport the Mishkan during its journeys in the desert, the tribal leaders also donated wagons and oxen, which were apportioned to the Levi'im according to their needs.

Some mefarshim (commentators) are puzzled by their offering. When the command was given for Bnei Yisrael (the rest of the Jews) to donate to the building of the Mishkan, their response was overwhelming. The generosity and magnanimity of the people came to the point where a public announcement needed to be made: "All the wise people came... and they said to Moshe as follows, 'The people are bringing more than enough for the work that Hashem has commanded to perform.' Moshe commanded that they proclaim throughout the camp, saying, '[No] man nor woman shall do any more work toward the gift for the sanctuary!' And the people were restrained from bringing." (Shemos 36:4-6)

One would imagine that as leaders of such a generous-spirited nation, the Nesi'im (Tribal leaders) themselves must surely have been exceptionally generous, giving individuals.

Picture that at your own wedding, your two very-rich uncles went fifty-fifty on your present. Would you be insulted? Imagine, further, that with this present - a very well-used Dodge car - was a note: "Dear Chassan and Kallah, Here's a car so that you can travel worry-free for many years to come!" How would you feel? Sure, it's fine, your uncles can give whatever they want - it's up to them. But to split it - Couldn't they each have afforded their own present? And to make such a bold claim - "travel worry-free!" - about a beat-up old Dodge? Mightn't you find their "generous" present a tad miserly?

By the same token, ask the mefarshim: Couldn't each Nasi afford a wagon of his own? Furthermore, if we look in Masechta Shabbos 98a it seems that the six wagons, two for the sons of Gershon and four for the sons of Merari, were highly inadequate for the enormous load of the numerous beams, crossbeams, and sockets of the Mishkan. The Gemara there goes into great detail about how the Levi'im had to balance the materials over the wagons and support them from falling. For leaders of such a great-spirited nation, one would have thought that they would have given enough oxen and

wagons to easily carry all the Mishkan's materials, and then some. So why did they split the wagons between two of them?

We find, explain mefarshim, that with regard to the quality of the materials used in the building of the Mishkan, no expense was spared. Gold and other precious metals and jewels adorned Hashem's holy abode. But with regard to quantity and size, measurements were very precise. The vessels of the Mishkan, for instance the cups which held the oil of the Menorah, were made-to-measure; they held precisely the right amount of oil to burn through the longest nights of the year, but no more. Great elegance and grandeur adorned the Mishkan, but no waste. Things were done magnificently, but not overdone.

Why? To impart to us a crucial message: Everything we possess we must ultimately find its place in our avodas Hashem (service of Hashem). "All of creation," exclaims the Talmud (Yoma 38a), "was created to glorify the name of Hashem." To have extra, to be excessive, means that there are some items which serve no holy purpose - they bring no kedushah (sanctity) into the world. It is a waste. The wagons and oxen were carefully calculated to provide just the right carrying power for the beams and materials of the Mishkan. Sure had there been more, things could have been more spread out - but then we wouldn't have understood the lesson. The Torah wanted we should understand that the ultimate purpose of all things - especially our own possessions - is to serve Hashem with all their potential.

In this light we can understand why Yaakov went back across the river to fetch some small jars. (See Rashi to Bereishis 32:25) "The money of the righteous," as the Talmud (Chulin 91a) expresses it, "is more important to them than [even] their bodies." Are the righteous that greedy? No. But they have strived all their lives that everything they possess should in some way bring honour to their Creator. So if something is lost, the righteous do not take it lightly.

If this is so with regard to our material possessions, it certainly applies to ourselves. We must serve Hashem, write sefarim, with every last drop of blood we possess. Not even one molecule, should be denied its chance to serve G-d and give Him glory. Just as the bodybuilder performs many different exercises in order to tone each of his muscles, so too we must look for fresh and innovative ways to serve Hashem with all the different faculties and abilities we have been given.

Are you sweating when you daven (pray) with all your might? Great! Do your bones ache when you get home after running around for hours performing a chessed (good deed) for another Jew? Wonderful! Do you arrive home from beis ha-midrash (study hall) at night after studying Torah and almost fall into bed out of exhaustion? Super! These are not signs of overwork. They are signs that we are maximizing our capabilities to their highest level, and serving Hashem with all we have. It is told that when the Chazon Ish was too tired to learn at his table, he would lie in bed and learn Torah that way, until his eyes could no longer stay open. R' Meyer of Dzikov, it is said, once ran to the window of his synagogue to catch a gasp of fresh air in the middle of davening - even though it was

the middle of the winter and there was no heating and temperatures inside the shul were sub-zero! That's what it means to serve Hashem with "every last drop of blood."

Nobody ever said it's easy to be an orthodox Jew while trying to support a family and live in a secular world. But nobody ever said it was supposed to be. This world is the Olam Ha-Asiyah, the Realm of Doing. Rest will come in the next world. For now, we must serve Hashem with all we have, and with everything we have.

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