

BIBLICAL FUND RAISING

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The Mishnah in Avos 5:26 states, "Delve into the Torah for everything is in it." When G-d commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan - Tabernacle, he was told to collect the required materials from "every man whose heart moves him to make a free-willed gift." (25:2) This verse is the first fund-raising campaign recorded in history. What lessons in fundraising can we glean from this verse?

At the end of last week's Parsha, the Torah described Moshe's ascent of Har Sinai. "Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone Tablets and the teaching and the commandment that I have written to teach them." (24:12) Is there a lesson to be learned from the juxtaposition of Moshe's ascent to receive the Torah and the first verse of this week's Parsha?

The uniqueness of Moshe's fundraising campaign for the building of the Mishkan is in the words "Yidvenu Leebo - whose heart moves him to make a free-willed gift." Why did G-d insist that all donations be free-willed? It would seem that the building of the Mishkan should not have been any less an obligation than the half-shekel we read about last week. The half-shekel was incumbent upon every adult (20+) male to contribute because it was used to purchase the public Korbonos - offerings for the coming year (starting the 1st of Nissan). It would seem that constructing the building wherein which the offerings would be brought should have been obligatory as well. Why did the contributions have to be free-willed?

The commentaries explain that this week's Parsha, the building of the Mishkan, actually happened after Moshe returned with the second set of Luchos. It was on the day after the first Yom Kippur that G-d commanded Moshe to begin building the Mishkan. However, the Torah did not record these events in chronological order because "G-d creates the cure before He gives the sickness."

The ordering of these events as recorded in the Torah was intended to present the Mishkan as the antidote for the sin of having worshiped the Golden Calf.

Sivan 6 - Aseres Hadibros - Ten Commandments.

Sivan 7 - Moshe ascended Har Sinai. This was Day 1 of the 40 days.

Tamuz 16 - the Golden Calf was created which was Day 39. Tamuz 17 - Moshe returned with the first Luchos and broke them. This was day 40.

Tamuz 18 - Moshe re-ascended Sinai for another 40 days to beg for forgiveness.

Av 29 - Moshe returned on day 40.

Av 30 (Rosh Chodesh Ellul) - Moshe re-ascended to receive the second Luchos for another 40 days.

Tishrei 10 (the 1st Yom Kippur) Moshe returned with the second Luchos. This was day 40.
Tishrei 11 - G-d commanded Moshe to start the building campaign.

In last week's issue I explained that the Bnai Yisroel experienced Mattan Torah from a perspective of Yirah - awe. Yirah, as explained by the Rambam, is a higher stage than Ahava - love. First a person must love G-d and then he can attain the level of being in awe of G-d. The basic difference between loving G-d and being in awe of G-d is that loving G-d is an experience of being a "Mikabel - a recipient of G-d's free-willed Chesed; whereas, being in awe of G-d generates the desire in us to emulate G-d by becoming a "Nosain - a giver and doing free-willed Chesed.

At the moment of Revelation the nation heard the voice of G-d commanding them to do Chesed - acts of kindness. Allow me to explain. The Siforno in Mishpatim writes that the social and judicial laws detailed in Mishpatim teach us the meaning of "Do not covet... anything that belongs to your fellow. Whatever is detailed in Mishpatim is a description of what we should not covet."

The practical application of "I am G-d, your G-d..." is "Do not covet." If we believe in a G-d Who created and maintains the universe then we must value every person as divinely important; otherwise, G-d would not have created them. Likewise, we must value personal possessions as being divinely ordained. Therefore, an individual who believes in the 1st Commandment, "I am G-d, your G-d" must also accept the 10th Commandment "Do not covet."

The difference between a Giver and a Taker is the degree to which we have matured beyond our own egocentricity. The Taker values all others in relation to what they can benefit him. The Giver values all others in relation to how much he can benefit them.

At Mattan Torah the Jews were given instructions how to use their free will to give to others. By keeping G-d's Mitzvos and respecting all people and their possessions we create the environment where everyone can accomplish their individual purpose and mission. That is the greatest possible Chesed. That is an act of giving and benefiting others. That is a free-willed giving that emulates G-d's Chesed.

G-d created this world as an act of Chesed. "Olam Chesed Yibaneh - the world was created through Chesed." By creating a world and populating it with people, G-d provided us with endless opportunities for doing Chesed and earning eternal reward. This was done for our benefit, not G-d's.

When Adam and Chava sinned with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they perverted G-d's perfect world of Chesed and introduced free-willed egocentricity. Adam and Chava sinned by doing what they wanted rather than following G-d's instructions. Until that point, everything functioned as it was supposed to in accordance with G-d's intentions in having created them. Once Adam and Chava ignored G-d's wishes and did as they desired, they used the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in a manner that G-d had not intended. They denied the fruit its rightful purpose in having been created. In essence, they stole from G-d.

At the moment of Mattan Torah the Jews had attained the level of "as one person with one intent." That meant that they realized that each one of them was equally significant and important to G-d. His grand plan for the universe required all of them. At that awesome moment, every Jew accepted the obligation to emulate G-d by caring for every other person and protecting his or her right to serve G-d. It was a unique moment of absolute giving without any thought of taking. The moment of Mattan Torah returned the world to its pristine Chesed that had existed before Adam and Chava had sinned.

When the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf they again introduced egocentricity into the universe. By worshipping the Golden Calf they did as they desired rather than what G-d had commanded. Therefore, the Tikun - fixing of their horrific mistake required them to recreate the world with pure Chesed with no other ulterior motive.

We are told that the construction of the Mishkan imitated the creation of the universe. Therefore, just as the world was built with Chesed, so too the Mishkan had to be built with Chesed. Just as the world was selflessly created by G-d to provide humanity with the opportunities for serving Him and doing free-willed Chesed, so too the Mishkan had to be selflessly created to provide us with opportunities for serving G-d and doing free-willed acts of Chesed.

The Mishkan was the Tikun - correction for the Golden Calf. The Golden Calf perverted the purity of "as one person with one intention," and the Mishkan reintroduced the pristine understanding that each of us has our unique purpose in being created. More than that, it reinforced the reality that we serve G-d as a community, not just as individuals. In order for each of us to properly serve G-d we need each other.

The Mishkan of yesteryear is the Shul of today. Just as we served G-d with offerings and sacrifices when we had the Mishkan and the Bais Hamikdash, so too we now serve G-d with prayer and the study of Torah. Prayer requires a Minyan and a Minyan is made up of ten individuals. Torah requires teachers and teachers require students. Just as the Mishkan functioned on the level of giving for the sake of others and needing others as an essential component for serving G-d, so too does the Shul function on the level of giving for the sake of others and needing each other in order to properly serve G-d.

The Ramban 25:1 writes, "The secret of the Mishkan is that the Glory which openly abode upon Mt. Sinai should abide upon it in a concealed manner... Thus Israel always had with them in the Mishkan the Glory which appeared to them on Mt. Sinai."

The Ramban explains that the Mishkan, and by extension the Bais Hamikdash and today's synagogues, are a continuation or reenactment of Mattan Torah. Every time a person is given an "Aliya - called up to the Torah," the ascent to the Bimah (platform) is a reenactment of Moshe ascending Sinai to receive the Torah.

When G-d commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan He demanded that all donations be from those

"whose heart moves him to make a free willed gift." The Mishkan was a symbolic recreation of the pristine world of Chesed that had once existed in Gan Eden and again at the foot of Har Sinai. Therefore, the only gift that could be used to build a symbolic world of Chesed was a free-willed gift given with the sole intent of giving to others.

In so far as fund-raising is concerned, the lesson of this week's first verse is, Give selflessly in support of our Shuls because only then will "Israel always have with them ... the Glory which appeared to them on Mt. Sinai."

Copyright © 2001 by [Rabbi Aron Tendler](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
