

ALWAYS GIVING CHARITY WITH A FULL HEART

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah in this week's parsha dwells upon the giving of one's wealth, assets, time and talents for an altruistic public cause - in this case the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle of Israel. The Torah lists a prerequisite for being able to give such a donation of effort and wealth. First the donor's heart must be willing and compassionate. Though charity is eventually realized in the actual act of giving, it begins within the heart of the giver.

Charity is an emotional and oftentimes gut-wrenching experience, both for the donor and the recipient. The Talmud indicates that the giving of wealth alone is insufficient to meet the true demands of charitable behavior and action. "God wants our hearts" is the Talmudic phrase that is applicable to charitable giving, as well as to most of Jewish life and law.

Giving without passion and sympathy is still giving, but it is imperfect. The heart must want before the hand signs the check. The Torah sets no goal or specified amount as to what one's donation to the Mishkan should or would be. Some people brought gold and silver, others gave items that would be considered to be less expensive and not as valuable.

The Torah makes no reference to these obvious differences. The copper and bronze mirrors that plated the altar, donated by the women of Israel, are given the same prominence in the Torah as the gold that was donated for the Holy Ark and the other artifacts. The Torah measures the giving by the intent of the heart of the giver.

As someone who has been engaged in Torah and Jewish fundraising for many decades, I can testify that when the emotion is present in the heart of the giver, the check is correspondingly larger. While I was in America recently I met a Jew from Israel who was collecting money to help a destitute family cope with a very serious medical issue. While in Los Angeles, he was robbed at gunpoint and the few thousand dollars that he had collected was stolen from him.

Later, when I met him in a different American city, he told me that people were more generous to him after they knew what had happened, even though the purpose of his collection had not changed. I told him that it was the emotion of the unfairness of his loss that now touched the hearts of people and that naturally their donations increased.

The nation of Haiti required enormous financial and social support from the rest of the world long before the devastating earthquake ravaged it. But it took the earthquake to reach the hearts of individuals, organizations and governments worldwide. The measure of the truly righteous is how

open their hearts are to others' problems and needs "normally." This, in essence, is the lesson of Parshat Terumah - though the original Mishkan constructed by Moshe no longer exists amongst us.

Shabat shalom

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com