

TABERNACLE BUILDING: SHARING OUR WEALTH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha of Terumah follows those of Mishpatim and Yitro. In parshat Yitro we experienced the moment of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people. In parshat Mishpatim the Torah began to fill in the details of Jewish law and life, especially as they relate to human and societal behavior and the standards of such behavior that the Torah wishes us to uphold.

In this week's parsha of Terumah the Torah presents another challenge to human behavior - wealth, money, charity and the ability to give away what one may deem to be his or hers. The Torah demands from us the ability to donate to others, to give to great causes, to the public welfare and to be able to share with others our material possessions.

The rabbis of the Talmud stated that this is one of the major identity tests of life. Miserliness, a bad eye and an unwillingness to be able to contribute to others in need are held to be violations of Torah principles and morals. The Torah at Sinai instructed us not to steal, not to take from others what belongs to them without their explicit consent. Now the Torah raises the bar and asks us to be able to give away what we deem to be ours to others less fortunate than us or to national and religious causes that benefit us all.

All of this is implied in the request for donations to help build the holy Mishkan/Tabernacle. The Lord could have provided us with a ready built spanking new Mishkan/Tabernacle on His own. Instead He challenged us then and in every continuing generation of Jewish life to build a Mishkan/Tabernacle on our own and from our own resources. And that requires a proper view of our own wealth and what we do with it.

My beloved Talmud rebbe taught me over sixty years ago how to read the daily newspaper - how to filter out the golden nuggets of life and morality from the overwhelming amount of dross that fills the pages of all of our newspapers. There was an item in the newspaper last week about a baseball pitcher who gave up a guaranteed salary of twelve million dollars for 2011 and retired from the game because he felt in all honesty that he could no longer pitch effectively and did not wish to be paid for essentially doing nothing.

This naturally goes against the grain of the vast majority of professional athletes whose greed and

avarice is so well known. That is why it made news - it was a man bites dog story. But it indicated to me that the lesson of parshat Terumah still lives in the human heart.

To be able to walk away from money not honestly earned is a Torah value. And to share and give of our wealth to others and to the building of society, to Torah education and a national home for Jews, is also a supreme Torah value.

We have to build our own Mishkan/Tabernacle constantly in every generation. The Torah's attitude towards the sharing of our wealth is the key to such a form of Mishkan/Tabernacle building.

Shabat shalom, Rabbi Berel Wein

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