

MATERIALS LISTED IN DESCENDING ORDER UNTIL THEY MENTION THE EXPENSIVE STONES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Terumah

Materials Listed In Descending Order Until They Mention The Expensive Stones

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #758 -- An Atara For A Talis? Good Shabbos!

When speaking about collecting the various materials used in building the Mishkan [Tabernacle], the Torah enumerates various materials in descending order of value (Gold, silver, copper...). However, at the end of the list, after having enumerated relatively inexpensive items (wood, oil, spices), the Torah lists the Shoham stones and the precious stones used in Ephod of the High Priest's breastplate (the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim).

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks the obvious question -- Why are the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim out of order in this catalog of solicited items which is apparently arranged in descending order of value? The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh suggests three reasons for this. We will briefly discuss the first reason, and then we will discuss the third reason more elaborately.

In Parshas Vayakhel, the Princes (of each Tribe) were the ones who brought the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim donations. However, the word used there for Princes (Nesiim) is spelled defectively -- without a yud. Our Sages explain that the Almighty was upset with them for delaying their donation until the end of the campaign. Although their motives were ostensibly good (they wanted to wait until the end to see where the shortfall was and they planned to make up the difference), Chazal tell us that this was not the correct attitude. They should have enthusiastically been among the first to give donations. Because of their lack of haste in making their donations, a letter was removed from their title.

So in his first explanation, the Ohr HaChaim explains why the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim were listed last here in Terumah -- because in fact they were the last things to be donated. This is to remind us of the foible on the part of the Princes in making that donation.

In the past, we have attempted to understand what exactly was wrong with what the Princes offered. In our experience, anyone who would make such a proposal to a fundraiser (you do the best you can and then come back to me -- I will cover the deficit) would be a hero.

I recently heard a new approach which helps explain the sentiment of Chazal from my good friend Dr. Marcel Reishcer. By assuming there would indeed be a deficit, the Princes were underestimating the generosity and the dedication of the Nation of Israel. They should have expected that everyone would give generously and that if they waited too long, they would have no contribution to make to enable them to have a share in the Mishkan. Who gave them the right to make such an assumption about the holy nation of Israel? They were in fact wrong. Everything WAS given to the extent that their contribution did not go for any part of the Mishkan -- only for the stones of the garments of the High Priest.

Be that as it may, according to the first answer of the Ohr HaChaim, the reason Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim were listed last in the sequence of materials was because they were the last things to be brought.

In his third interpretation, the Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh quotes a Gemara [Yoma 75a] that the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim were brought to the Princes on clouds from Gan Eden. Since these were donations that in effect "came from Heaven" and did not represent and blood, sweat, or tears -- there was no toil involved -- they were listed after the oils and spices, which, although they may have cost only pennies, did represent a gift that came from people's labor and efforts and in that way were superior to the much more "expensive" gifts of precious stones.

That which counts in the eyes of the Almighty is not the value of the gift received but what the gift represented for the person who brought the gift. A poor person's check of \$18, which may be something he had to scrape for, can very well mean more in the Eyes of Heaven than a six figure gift which is "pocket change" for the person who wrote the check. This is the lesson (according to the 3rd approach) of the Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim's sequence at the tail end of the list of materials donated.

Apropos to this, I would like to very briefly read an article that was published in a newspaper in Vilna called "Dem Vort". This is a reporter's description of the dedication of the new building of the Yeshiva in Kletzk. [Rav Aharon Kotler, before he founded the Lakewood Yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey, was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva in Kletzk.] The dedication was a major event. Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer came from Eretz Yisroel, Rav Elchanon Wasserman was also in attendance for this "Chanukas HaBayis" of the Kletzker Yeshiva, as was Rav Shimon Shkop, and all the leading Torah personalities of the pre-World War II Eastern Europe.

The reporter describes the massive parade through the town from the house of the Rosh Yeshiva to the new Yeshiva building. They entered the building and the Gabbaim (financial officers of the Yeshiva) went to the Bimah. People came up to the Bimah and gave their small donations to the

Gabbaim. In the presence of all the Roshei Yeshiva, the Gabbaim made a blessing (Mi SheBerach) for each of the contributors. The reporter further writes (which may be startling to us) that the women too marched into the Beis Medrash. They took their ruble coins out of their purses and gave them to the Gabbaim so that they too could have a portion in the new Beis Medrash in Kletzk.

The reporter describes how a short old woman slowly and with difficulty made her way through the Beis Medrash towards the bimah. With a trembling hand she stretched out her very modest donation to give it to the Gabbai. Tears were rolling down her shriveled cheeks. "She was not just giving her few pennies; she was giving her very Jewish soul towards the building costs of that Yeshiva building." The reporter writes how inspired he was to see the joy and emotion that radiated from her face at having the privilege to participate in this historic event.

This is what the Ohr HaChaim HaKodosh means in the answer cited above. A donation of goat hairs given with self-sacrifice may be deserving of being listed ahead of the most magnificent gift of precious stones, which come about without any toil or labor on the part of the donors.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Teruma are provided below:

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