

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

Parshat T'rumah opens with the words: "Daber El Bnei Yisrael V'yikchu Li Terumah" (Sh'mot 25:2). The literal translation of the verse is: "Speak to the children of Israel that they shall take a donation for Me." Most Darshanim seizing on this Pasuk zero in on the puzzling fact that the act of giving a gift for the Mishkan, is referred to as an act of taking. This linguistic irregularity has served as fertile ground for generations of Darshanim and has spawned endless Vertlach. (One quick personal favourite: Although we often feel as if we are generously opening our hands to share our belongings with another, in truth the entire universe belongs to G-d, thus, all we have has actually been taken from Him).

In order to 'distance myself from the maddening crowd', I chose this week to look elsewhere, and place my focus on an additional facet of this verse. The Ba'al HaTurim points out that the numeric value, Gof this verse equals the Gematria of 'only the children of Israel shall be donors and not the Gentiles'. The Yerushalmi (Terumot 1:1) reaches this same conclusion by emphasizing the expression 'Daber El Bnei Yisrael': "Speak to the children of Israel - to the exclusion of non-Jews". This demand, that the Temple be built by Jewish monies, is echoed in the Book of Ezra (4:3) where we are told that the building of the Temple is not to be a joint effort with the Kutim. Rather, it is we, the Jewish people, who must Yachad, together, build the "house" for our G-d.

A closer examination of the historical record, however, provides a more nuanced picture, as non-Jews were involved in the building of both Batei Mikdash. Shlomo HaMelech accepted building materials donated made by Hiram, the Phoenician King of Tyre, for the first Beit HaMikdash, and similarly, the Herodian upgrade of the second Beit Mikdash transforming it into one of the major wonders of the day, was spearheaded by an Edomite king (Herod), who may or may not have undergone conversion.

Whether we classify donations given towards the building of the Temple under the general rubric of Tz'daka, or categorize these contributions under a separate heading, it seems clear that the problematic aspect of receiving gifts from the Gentiles extends to all charities and is not limited to the building of the Temple. This prohibition is clearly stated in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah, 254:1), where several commentators (see Shach and Taz ad loc.) state emphatically that accepting financial support from the gentiles is characterized as a Chilul Hashem, even in order to feed our poor (!), since this indicates that we are incapable of taking care of our own needy people.

This major question of public policy seems to follow us incessantly. We recently mentioned the great debate following World War II regarding the acceptance of German reparations. Today various non-Jewish groups strive to help the Jewish People whether through messianic initiatives such as advocating the building of a third Beit HaMikdash, or via more mundane charities such as providing funds to feed

the poor, and/or to bring Jews to live in Eretz Yisrael, etc. In regards to all these the same question looms: Should we accept their gifts? Although this seems to contradict the Shulchan Aruch, perhaps we should learn the lesson from the debate that raged in the fifties?

Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik zt"l was initially amongst those who voiced their opposition. In later years, though, he revised his position. As Rabbi Herschel Shachter reports, the Rav believed that history had conclusively demonstrated that so many positive developments were made possible only due to the funds received. Is there a lesson here for today? - The comparison is anything but simple: As we all know, the first years of the State of Israel were exceedingly difficult ones. In the three years between 1948-1951 the population had doubled with new Olim who fled Arab countries many with only the shirts on their backs. They had to be provided for; Housing had to be built! It was a period known as the years of Tzena (austerity) when food rationing was enforced under a special ministry. To say that the reparations monies were helpful would be a gross understatement, and yet this was a clear She'at Hadechak, a time of "dire need", if there ever was one...

I have no intention of silencing this debate and would like to venture one thought relating to the anticipation of the appearance of the 3rd Beit Hamikdash.

We would do well to steer away from economic and practical considerations, and zero in on moral and spiritual improvement. There is a disagreement as to whether this Temple will reappear only in Messianic times, or whether we

can actually build it in our time.

Many fastidiously devote themselves to the study of all the practical aspects of this future building, and all of the vessels which will inhabit it - their exact physical makeup and dimensions, etc. However, Parshat Teruma teaches us that the question of our communal moral and spiritual level, is no less important than these physical and economical considerations.

Thus, a few verses after the Pasuk we quoted earlier regarding the monies for the Mishkan, the Torah writes that the purpose of all the contributions gathered together, is: V"asu Li Mikdash... K'chol Asher Ani Mareh Otcha... V'chen Ta'asu (Sh'mot 25:8-9). The Malbim explains that V'chen Ta'asu - and so shall you do, means that each and every one of us is commanded to erect an internal Mikdash B'chedrei Levavo - in the inner chambers of the heart - preparing oneself to be an abode for the Shechina.

As the song BILVAVI says:

In my heart I will build a Mishkan, for the beauty of His honor...

And for a korban, I will offer Him my only soul.

May we be Zocheh to build both the personal, as well as the communal Mikdash - B'har HaKodesh Birushalayim!

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