

Brother, Can You Spare a ...

Baruch Hashem! Throughout my professional life in Jewish education and youth work, I never was relied upon to raise funds. There was always someone else responsible to build the buildings, keep the lights on and pay the salaries. For about half of my 45 years in the field, that someone was one of the greatest contribution generators, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin. He was a rebbe and mentor to me, but also had that amazing ability to find those righteous partners who paid the bills and my paycheck. It's truly a talent, and I was often spellbound by his skill at guiding a remarkable group of philanthropists into his sphere of influence. Many wonderful people came to share his visions, and their largesse made dreams come true. But there was a founding father of this enterprise of Jewish giving, and his name was Moshe Rabeinu. This week's Torah reading displays his knack for guiding the cash flow.

Moshe was so good at this enterprise of collecting for the construction of the Mishkan that a few readings hence, he actually has to tell the

Children of Israel to stop their giving: Moshe gave orders to make an announcement in camp, 'Let no man or woman do any more giving for the sacred offering', and only then did they stop giving (Sh'mot 36:6). Wow! Talk about a successful fund raiser. Then Moshe did the other necessary step for a great fund raiser. He gave an exact accounting of all that had been raised. I think today we'd keep collecting and find another project. The account of that building campaign begins this week.

Actually, according to the Midrash there were three appeals made by Moshe. This conclusion comes from the fact that the word T'RUMA appears three times at the beginning of the parsha. This word literally means to raise up, but is usually translated as 'offering' (Rav Aryeh Kaplan), 'gift' (JPS) or 'donation' (Dr. Robert Alter). The three funds were: the one-time collection for the Mishkan construction, the annual half-shekel for communal offerings and the later donations for Temple upkeep (BEDEK HABAYIT, Megila 29b).

The cool thing is that just last November it was announced that a coin from the First Beit HaMikdash was found at an archeological site in Jerusalem with the word BEKA engraved on it. This word is found twice in Tanach, and one of those times it describes the half shekel

offering for the annual head tax (Sh'mot 38:26). We now know that a Biblical shekel weighed 11.33 grams. Can you imagine being that volunteer sifting through the rubble and finding that 2500 year old coin? I've only found broken pottery in my archeological attempts.

In discussing the philanthropy trade with another very successful fundraiser, he confided in me how he did it. He told me that it was simple to ask others for money once you believed that you were involved in the most important enterprise on earth. It worked for him, but according to Rashi, Moshe Rabbeinu had another tactic.

Our parsha begins with God's instructions to Moshe: V'YIK-CHU LI T'RUMA (Take for Me an offering). Rashi is consistent in explaining the word LI as 'on my behalf' (LISHMI). He gave the same explanation for this formula declared to Avraham Avinu, when the verse records God's instruction LECH L'CHA (B'reishit 12:1). That should mean 'Go forth for your own sake', according to Rashi. Rashi reiterates this translation style in verse 8 of our parsha, when the verse says, 'Make for Me a MIKDASH (sanctuary or 'holy place').' Again, Rashi insists that LI must mean 'for Me' or 'on My behalf'.

Why does the usually laconic Rashi repeat himself just a few verses later?

The answer is actually quite simple. Other commentaries render the word LI to mean MISHELLI, 'from My things', because God owns everything (T'mura 31a). Actually, this would make sense because of God's claim in the verse, 'Mine (LI) is the silver and mine (LI) is the gold, says the lord of Hosts (Chagai 2:8). And, again back in B'reishit, Rashi himself claims that when Rivka tells Ya'akov to get 2 goats so that she can make a meal for Yitzchak, she says, 'Go to the flocks and fetch LI 2 kids, so that I can make the dish your father likes (27:8)', Rashi explains that she meant the goats belonged to her. They apparently were part of her dowry, written into her Ketuba (Midrash Raba).

Now we can explain Rashi's repetition. He wanted to emphasize that the donations were FOR God not FROM God, because that's the right way to make an appeal. Moshe was petitioning their philanthropic tendencies, not their frugality. Give this to God, because you want to, not because ultimately all belongs to God anyway. This fits in well with the beginning of our parsha where YIDVENU LIBO is emphasized (verse 2), which means 'who is motivated by a generous heart'. You can't be displaying generosity if you truly believe that you don't own the assets being donated.

Moshe is straight forward in his

presentation to the potential donors. He spells out very specifically exactly what's needed for the project. He's so specific about the requirements that he details items we don't even recognize anymore. What is a TACHASH anyway? The only thing we're sure of is that it was waterproof, because it was used for the roof of the MISHKIN.

The community was inspired into enthusiastic giving by the sincere appeal of Moshe Rabbeinu. He told them precisely what was needed, he accounted for every penny raised, and, most importantly, he absolutely insisted that the assets were for God, and God alone. I believe that such an appeal would move our generation as well. We pray so hard that our generation will be tasked with finding the funding for the next iteration of God's holy abode in our midst. Until then, be generous to those causes most in keeping with Moshe's guidelines. 🙏