

If we look around us today at this beautiful synagogue, we can ask ourselves, where did it come from? Of course it took many builders, architects, designers and others to build, but it also took the generosity of our community. The same goes for my school, Vancouver Talmud Torah Elementary, which is currently under construction. Although I will be graduating from VTT this year, I am grateful to those who donated money to the school so that future generations of students could enjoy the advantages of a new and modern building. Our community was happy to give this money so that we could build two productive Jewish structures. Was this the law? Did people have to give money to help build a synagogue and a Jewish school? Of course not! The people in our community gave willingly in the hopes of creating a stronger Jewish community with better services. In other words, they gave from their hearts.

It is a great mitzvah to give to one's community, however, I think that it is even more special when it comes from the heart.

The mitzvah of giving generously is clearly shown in this week's parasha, Vayakhel which is in the book of Exodus. Moses tells the people of Israel to give unique and special objects to help build the Mishkan. The Mishkan was the portable synagogue that was used when the people of Israel were travelling through the desert. Some of the items given were precious metals, wood, stones, spices and other valuable objects. It says in chapter 35, verse 29,

“כָּל-אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה, אֲשֶׁר נָדַב לָבָם אֹתָם, לְהָבִיא לְכָל-הַמְּלָאכָה, אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת
בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה--הֵבִיאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל נְדָבָה, לַיהוָה.

This translates to “the children of Israel brought a freewill offering unto the LORD; every man and woman, whose **heart** made them willing to bring for all the work, which the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses to be made.”

And in French is “tous les hommes et les femmes – ce que la générosité de leur **cœur** les porta à offrir pour l'un des travaux que L'Éternel avait ordonnés par l'intermédiaire de Moïse, les enfants d'Israël l'apportèrent en don généreux pour L'Éternel.”

This passage shows that people did not provide objects because they were commanded to, but because they wanted to help. In fact, the people of Israel brought so much that Moses had to tell them to stop giving to the Mishkan and even then there were extras. The Israelites were so busy giving from their hearts that they lost track of how much was given.

I feel that it is an important mitzvah to give from the heart. I feel this way for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it creates a win win situation. For example, if you donate money to a hospital, you are enjoying feeling like you made a difference while at the same time the people in the hospital are actually benefiting from your donation.

Another reason I feel it is important to give willingly is because in Judaism we have a responsibility to imitate G-d's actions. One of those actions was when G-d brought peace and order to the world at the time of its creation when it was in total chaos. Unfortunately, after that creation, things began to unravel which resulted in not all people having what they need. When we give to people in need, we are helping to fix this imbalance and to make the world a better place. We can achieve this by giving generously and in this way we are continuing G-d's work and doing tzedakah.

When I say to give willingly, the Torah is very helpful because it has guidelines on how much to give. It says that we should aim to give 10% of our earnings to charity. This is important to keep in mind so that we don't feel like we have to give everything that we have but that we should aim to give enough to really feel like we did all we could to make a difference.

However, sometimes, even though people are capable of giving they don't want to give, or have no pleasure in giving. This may be because they have lost their connection with what they are giving to. When the Israelites gave to the Mishkan, they gave so much from free will because they knew that this was where they could pray to G-d and where they could sacrifice animals for G-d. It meant so much to them that they wanted to make it as special as it could be. If the request for unique and special objects had been for an Egyptian G-d, I don't think that the Israelites would have been as generous because they would not have felt connected.

One way in which people could give more from their hearts is by being more involved with their community. By knowing your community better, you could be more aware and better understand your community's needs. In so doing you would have a better idea of what to give and how much to give, all the while feeling more connected.

This sharing with others will in time make other people want to give back to the communities that helped them out. Ideally, this would lead to a circle of giving and receiving.

Like the people of Israel did in this week's parasha, we can also give with our hearts. If we are fortunate and lucky enough to be able to give, be it money, our time, items we are no longer using, then we should do so willingly and generously.

Winston Churchill once said "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

If we all give generously, it could add up to so much. But should we limit ourselves to giving only to our community? Definitely not. As far out as we can reach to make a difference, that is as far as we should go. There is no limit.

Shabbat Shalom