



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Take Ownership

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In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

Terouma

Take Ownership

Has anyone here ever been to Israel? [Interact with crowd.]

Besides being the Holy Land, our inheritance from G-d, it's also a beautiful country. But there's one thing you'll notice about Israel if you go to Jerusalem or any major city in the country: In Israel, any Jew can walk into his or her neighborhood synagogue any time, any day, and no one will ask them if they are a member. At best, the Jew will drop a few coins into the pushka, the charity box, on the wall, and that's it—but to pay a few hundred dollars every year?! In Israel, it's unheard of.

In Israel, the government builds the synagogue in each neighborhood. The rabbis get their salaries not from the synagogue but from the government. Essentially, they are government employees.

So when Israelis come to the United States and discover that they have to pay membership fees to participate in synagogue prayers, they're completely surprised. They never heard of such a thing: paying to pray?!

So we can ask the question: What's better—the Israeli philosophy that the government fund all its citizens' religious needs, or the Diaspora philosophy, which says that every community member needs to bear his part of the financial burden of the community's religious needs?

Which brings us to this week's Torah portion.

In the Parshah of Terumah, we read about the building of the Mishkan, the “Tabernacle” that was the forerunner of the Bais HaMikdash, the Holy Temple.

Now, how long did the Mishkan stand for?

At first, it stood for the 39 years during which the Jews wandered the desert. Then, when the Jews entered the Holy Land in the days of Joshua, the Mishkan—which was portable and collapsible, like a giant tent of sorts—was erected at Gilgal, not too far from the Jordan River. It stood there for 14 years.

After Gilgal, the Mishkan was moved to Shiloh, where the original wooden walls were exchanged for permanent stone walls, with only the original roof made of sheets remaining. The Mishkan stood in Shiloh for 369 years.

After Shiloh, the Mishkan was moved to Nov, and then to Givon.

Between all its locations and relocations, the Mishkan that Moshe Rabbeinu built stood for a total of 479 years.

When Shlomo Hamelech completed the Bais Hamikdash in Jerusalem, it was a massive task that took him seven years. The Temple was monumental beyond all proportions. It was 15 times the size of the Mishkan and at least three times taller. Naturally, then, when it was finally completed, there was a huge celebration.

Immediately after the death of Shlomo Hamelech, the Kingdom of Israel split into two: King Rechavam, the son of Shlomo, ruled over the Kingdom of Judah, with ten Tribes seceding from him and creating their own kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel, over which they crowned Yeravam ben Nvat. (That’s when the well-known concept of “the Ten Lost Tribes” began.)

Now, the first thing that Yeravam did as King of Israel was to seal off all the roads that led to Jerusalem. He set up watchmen to not allow anyone to go up to the Holy Temple. And that's how it was all through the years of the Kingdom of Israel, until they were exiled. (Actually, several years before they were exiled, the roads were reopened.)

But what all this meant was that the Bais Hamikdash served as a spiritual center for the entire Jewish Nation for only 29 years during Shlomo's reign—but immediately after his death, ten Tribes, representing 75 percent of the Jewish Nation, didn't go up to the Temple even once, and never saw the Temple.

Isn't it strange, my friends, how the relatively tiny Mishkan stood as a center for aliyah, for spiritual pilgrimage, for almost 500 years—but the giant, beautiful structure built in Jerusalem didn't succeed in rallying the entire Jewish people around it?

It's a big question: How, indeed, could ten entire Tribes of Israel allow Yeravam to cut them off from the one spiritual center in the Holy Land still in existence in those days? There were no neighborhood synagogues! And not only that, it seems that there were very few batei medrash, study halls, either! Any Jew who wanted to find G-d needed to go to the Bais Hamikdash—and along came King Yeravam and closes the roads to Jerusalem... and no one says a word!

How was it possible that there was no fierce public protest? To be sure, there were individuals here and there who stole away to Jerusalem—but by and large, the Jewish Nation carried on with their daily routines.

The answer can be found in the differences between our Parshah and our Haftarah.

The Parshah begins with the command, “Have them take for Me an offering; from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity...” In other words, G-d commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to let it be known that anyone who wants to donate towards the construction of the Mishkan is invited to do so—the Mishkan was built entirely by donations.

As the Torah in Parshas Vayakhel describes it, the Jews all came flocking happily, all excited to donate to the Mishkan: They all came, men and women alike, gladly bringing everything they had to give to the Mishkan, with some women even bringing their own cosmetics mirrors. They brought so much that after three days, the overseers notified Moshe Rabbeinu (Shmos 36:22) that “the people are bringing very much”—there was already more than enough.

But not only were the materials for the construction of the Mishkan donated—even the construction and labor itself was donated, with each laborer and skilled artisan contributing his or her own talents. As the verse (Shmos 36:4) tells us, “each one from his work, which they had been doing.” And the women were also involved in the construction, as the verse (35:26) tells us, “And all the women whose hearts uplifted them with wisdom, spun the goat hair.”

In contrast, when we read the Haftarah about the building of the Bais Hamikdash, we discover a different picture altogether: “And King Solomon raised a tax from all of Israel.”

When it came to building the Bais Hamikdash, Shlomo Hamelech didn’t collect donations—he was a king, and he put a tax on everyone. He drafted thousands of men into construction work for the Temple, and on top of that, he appointed “three hundred [officers] who would subjugate the people doing the work.”

In this story, there are no “hearts motivated to generosity.” Neither was Shlomo Hamelech waiting for volunteers to come forth to build the Bais Hamikdash—here, people were drafted and ordered to build. It was all built on taxes, and the entire building was built with money collected by taxes.

The result was that the Jewish People didn’t have an emotional connection to the Bais Hamikdash. Nobody felt that this was his house, that it was something he or she could relate to. Yes, it was a nice building, an architectural gem, that the kingdom had built, but it didn’t have any emotion or personal connections associated with it. And so when Yeravam came along and sealed off the roads to Jerusalem, no one had a problem with it. No one felt cut off from something they were emotionally connected to. The Bais Hamikdash was no one’s baby.

As we see in modern-day Israel, when the Israeli government builds local neighborhood synagogues, no one feels that it belongs to him or her. When the rabbi is merely an employee of the state, no one feels that he is their rabbi.

The Rebbe explains that G-d created the universe in “giver/receiver mode”—and that everyone needs to be both a giver and a receiver. Only then can one truly form a true bond with another human being. And therefore, it is this mode that is the most efficient. When you’re just a receiver but not a giver, when you only get from others, but you do not give, then you’re going to run into problems.

To offer another example, I know of a Day school that brought in a consulting company to do a study on what improvements parents would want in the school. So the consultants sent a survey home with each student, to be filled out by their parents. The survey contained ten questions—and also contained space for complaints. And you know what happened? The consultants discovered that the parents who complained the most were the one who paid the least tuition particularly those whose children were on 100 percent scholarships.

Only when a person pays for something does he truly feel that it belongs to him. Only then does he care for the school, or the synagogue, or the Mishkan.

I'm not going to ask you for a donation at this time—as you know, Chabad has long prided itself on welcoming every Jew regardless of whether they donate or not. As Chabad, there is no membership: You're Jewish. And that's all that counts.

So what's the message here? Simple: Don't take the Torah and her mitzvos for granted. Buy into them. Invest in them. Make them yours. Spend money on them. Show them you mean business!

If you've started studying the Torah lately, get excited about it: Go out and buy yourself a handsome Chumash with an English translation.

If you want to put a mezuzah on your door, go all out: Go online and order yourself a really nice mezuzah case to go on your door with it.

If you recently started keeping kosher, don't settle for bagels and lox! Get yourself a nice new kosher cookbook and whip up some of the most mouth-watering Italian, French or whatever cuisine you've ever tasted.

Whatever your mitzvah of choice, get into it. Spend a few serious dollars on it. Then, when you observe that mitzvah, you'll love it all the more—because now, it's not just a mitzvah: It's *your* mitzvah.

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