

In Parshat Mikketz Joseph dedicates himself to the task of making sure that people throughout Egypt and the surrounding areas will have grain to eat during the seven years of famine foretold in Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph remained dedicated to God and solid in his faith that God had a plan for him all through his time as a slave and in prison. This trust pays off and Joseph becomes the second most powerful man in Egypt and also is reunited with his brothers when they come to Egypt to acquire grain for their families back in Canaan. When his brothers beg his forgiveness in next week's parsha, Joseph tells them "be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that God sent me ahead of you" (Gen 45:5) Joseph had an amazing dedication to God's plan for him and did not question the means used by God to carry out God's plans. Unfortunately, by the time we get to the part of the Torah from which our Hanukkah maftir reading comes, such devotion to God can be hard to find. B'nei Israel has been in the desert for awhile and they have worked hard to create a home for God in the desert so that God can dwell among them. Despite their willingness to contribute to this major undertaking, they continue to complain about lack of water and monotonous manna. There are uprisings and kvetching with some regularity and they will continue – a couple of parshiot from now Miriam and Aaron complain against Moses and shortly after that we have the story of the spies who decide that B'nei Israel shouldn't go into Canaan at this time and get the whole group sentenced to 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

In the midst of all of this kvetching we have the story of the dedication of the Tabernacle and the gifts that are made by each tribe on this occasion. The gifts given at this time are all the same from each tribe and are given one tribe a day for 12 days. This idea of each tribe giving the same thing, rather than each one taking advantage of the occasion to try to win favor by outdoing the tribe before, reminded me of the ½ shekel that each adult male is asked to give toward the building of the Mishkan. No matter how rich or how poor a person was, they were all expected to make the same donation. This donation was not about showing off your wealth but rather supporting the community and being counted as a member of it. A different kind of donation is made in Parashat Terumah. Here God gives a list of needed materials and tells Moshe "let them take for Me a

portion, from every person whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion." (Ex 25:2) Here God allows gifts of freewill and according to the means of the donor. This opportunity for giving is greeted with great generosity. Rashi comments that by saying "for Me" - the simple Hebrew term "li" – God removes any idea that their generosity gains them honor. According to the Stone Chumash, their donations are made out of an eagerness to have a share in creating a resting place for God amongst them. Their generosity is so overwhelming that they actually have to be told to stop as they have given more than is needed.

In our maftir today, and in the readings each day during Hanukkah, we hear about 12 identical gifts to the Tabernacle made by a "chief" of each tribe. In addition to the gifts being identical, the order of giving is according to God's order not the birth order of the namesake of the tribe – this further decreases any individual or tribal honor that might be taken from the giving of these gifts. Despite these precautions, many commentators contend that each tribe came up with the formulation of their gift individually and that some symbolism is reflected in their choices. Midrash explains that each identical offering alludes to the spiritual mission of the tribe giving it. Rav Yosef Soloveitchik explains that each tribe brought its unique spiritual mission along with their donation and wanted to join their inner tribal desires to the national mission as signified by the Tabernacle. This is seen as the reason why, in a book known for its terseness – not one word is wasted or unnecessary according to the Sages – each of these 12 identical donations are listed separately as opposed to just the summary given at the end of the parshat Nasso – "This was the dedication of the Altar, on the day it was anointed, from the leaders of Israel: 12 silver bowls, 12 silver basins, 12 gold ladles..." If the individuality of these gifts was not important, I have to believe in a book which skips over major portions of important characters lives and sums them up with "after these things", that this summary is all that we would have been told.

Each of us make contributions to our community - to our Kehillah Kedusha – to Beit Shalom – our contributions are made in a way that speaks to both our ability to give and our deepest spiritual desires and needs. We also give to other groups, communities and causes for the same reasons. We give to feel connected, we give

to support the work of each group and we give because we know it is the right thing to do. But we don't just give financially – gifts of gold ladles and red and blue fabric aren't all that is needed to keep our holy community going or to provide a dwelling place for God amongst us. Gifts of time, energy, talent, knowledge, friendship and more are needed and are given by each individual as they are able and as they are moved.

Rav Soloveitchik says that anyone bringing an offering must bring it with sincere feelings of repentance and/or a desire to draw closer to God. When God asks for gifts in Terumah they are specifically qualified as being "Li" "for me" (that's God, not Nance!) to remove any personal honor that might be gained and also is meant to remove peer pressure to give more than one is able. We also have the half shekel donation to think about when we are giving. We have in our tradition gifts that are equal and gifts that are made as our spirit moves us. We have both in our community as well – we have our "obligations" such as dues and we have opportunities for giving from our hearts based on our unique talents and gifts. Each and every gift should be considered as "li" and not as an opportunity for personal honor. Like Joseph we need to see our talents as coming from God and our ability to give as a gift. When presented with an opportunity to give, whether it is a gift of money, your skills as a davener, a leyner, or other service leader, doing door duty, teaching a class, beautifying the grounds or stuffing envelopes for the office, I hope that you will be able to approach the giving of that gift "Li" - with a spirit of dedication to our Kehillah and its continued health. As Hanukkah comes to an end this afternoon I hope that this season of rededication has left us each refocused and ready to brighten the world by finding new opportunities to give of our gifts.