

SETTING LIMITS

Based on Insights of Harav Menachem Zaks, zt"l

After amassing what they needed to build the Mishkan, the people in charge of its construction approached Moshe and informed him that they felt inundated with materials to be used for the Mishkan. The materials they had gathered far exceeded their needs. These men, referred to by the Torah as "wise men," were not feeling overwhelmed or flustered — they had simply done the math in their heads and knew when they had received the necessary amounts. Therefore, they questioned Moshe, why were they continuing to take unnecessary donations (*Shemos* 36)?

Moshe knew that their calculations were correct and thus spread word among the Jewish people to cease

bringing items (*ibid.* 36:6). Moshe would not permit *Bnei Yisrael* to give more than was needed so that there would be a surfeit of material or money for a future "rainy day." Money was being collected for a specific project; when that goal was reached, the campaigning stopped.

Yet the Torah says that when Moshe gave the order for people to stop donating, they were actually held back because they really wanted to donate more. In fact, *Bnei Yisrael* had been bringing contributions for the building of the Mishkan with such generosity that the entire "fundraising" process was completed in just two days (*ibid.* 36:3).

In the *sefer Menachem Tzion*, Harav Menachem Zaks asks why Moshe told

the Jewish people to stop donating materials; why not let them give as much as they wanted, and use the surplus to make additional, fancier vessels? After all, the Beis Hamikdash designed by Shlomo Hamelech and the construction done by Hordus were both much more elaborate than the Mishkan and contained many more vessels. Why couldn't the people in the desert do the same for the Mishkan? No matter how minor, functions could have been found for an unlimited number of items in the Mishkan. In contributing more, the people would benefit from fulfilling a *mitzvah*, and they would further beautify the Mishkan. What was the reason Moshe stopped the collection?

Harav Zaks answers that there was a fundamental difference between the Mishkan and the Beis Hamikdash, and there evolved separate ways to handle the collection of surplus materials. The Mishkan was built as a temporary structure that did not stay in one place all the time. It was built while the

nation was traveling through the desert on their way to Eretz Yisrael, and it was carried to each new location by the *leviim*. Every time Hashem signaled to set it down, it was reconstructed to the exact measurements as before.

Since the Mishkan was to be carried by people, it was not fair to keep accepting donations and adding vessels to the structure, which would make it more unwieldy and more difficult for the *leviim* to carry. Out of consideration for the *leviim*, who would have to carry additional vessels, Moshe put an end to further donations.

On the other hand, the Beis Hamikdash was a stationary building; *Bnei Yisrael* were never going to move it to a location outside Yerushalayim. Therefore, the more donations were accepted, the more *mitzvos* the givers would acquire and the more glorious the Beis Hamikdash would appear, at nobody else's expense.

Harav Zaks stresses that this should teach us all a great lesson in consideration. In attempting to fulfill a commandment, a person must first consider the impact of the *mitzvah* on others. Even if a deed appears good or charitable, one must contemplate and project the outcome beforehand. An individual will not receive the same benefit and reward for doing a *mitzvah* if it creates a burden for someone else.

One often-cited example is when a person enters a crowded shul after *davening* has started and pushes his way through the other *mispallelim* to reach his seat. In general, a person is supposed to *daven* in a set place and use the same seat. (One reason brought down is that when a person is familiar with a set place, it helps him concentrate on the words he is saying.) The latecomer may feel that the importance of his own *tefillah* justifies disturbing all the other people and causing them to lose their concentration. Is this person acting properly? Clearly, he is putting his

own needs ahead of everyone else's.

So too, we see that it was not right for people to gain honor by continuing to contribute to the Mishkan, even though it was a *mitzvah*, if it added to the burden of the *leviim*, who would

purchase will make his neighbors less than happy, either out of jealousy or because of the pressure they will feel to "keep up with the Cohens," then he must make a true *cheshbon hanefesh*, facing the fact that perhaps he should

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have to carry all the additional items.

Taking a lesson for ourselves, we can learn from here that when we spend money, we should consider the burden we place on another Jew. We must establish a strict spending standard, giving utmost consideration to how our spending might affect another person. When we spend a few extra dollars on fancier clothing for our children or furnishings for our homes, we must stop and consider whether we are creating a burden for our friends, who may not be able to keep up but feel they must. What gives us the right to pressure others? Only for the sake of a *mitzvah* can we allow ourselves to overspend – and even then, with caution; certainly when it comes to things like extra features in a new car, we should be careful with what we choose.

Of course, we all may agree that a person who drives in comfort has the ability to be more alert, just like the one who comes to shul and has a set seat is capable of better concentration in his *davening*. But that doesn't mean he is permitted to drive over someone else to reach his place.

The Torah is giving us a clear guideline for our behavior *bein adam lachavero*. A person must consider how his actions will affect his friends at all times, including when he is in the process of a major purchase. If he thinks there is a possibility that his

not buy this item at all.

Particularly during this difficult time, when the majority of us are extremely anxious about maintaining our current level of *parnassah* – let alone exceeding it – those who are fortunate enough not to have to face this challenge from Hashem should reconsider how they appear in public so as to not cause others unnecessary pain. This is its own *nisayon* and should be kept in mind at all times.

If a purchase has a negative impact on others, the item should not be bought. (Of course, one can buy an item and keep it hidden from view, but such extreme privacy generally precludes the urge to make a large purchase in the first place – which is a good-enough reason to forgo the transaction!)

We see again and again from the words of the Torah that each of its lessons can apply to all of Hashem's children, generation after generation. We can now understand the reason the Torah tells us that *Bnei Yisrael* were "forced" to stop being so free with their money for the sake of the *mitzvah*. When spending our own money – however honestly it is earned – might cause pain to someone else, we should avoid doing so. And that can be our own personal way of creating a resting place for Hashem on this earth, until He feels that we are deserving of building Him a proper home. **M**