

GIVING FROM THE HEART

HOW CAN WE BUILD HOLY CONNECTIONS BY GIVING WHOLE-HEARTEDLY?

TORAH BLESSING

DISCUSSING THE SERMON:

In sharing the following image of the Mishkan in the camp, Cantor Mutlu said:

It turns out there are lots of pictures of the Mishkan described in this week's Torah portion, but I liked this one best, because it depicts the closeness of the people. It shows how the tents were snug up to the Mishkan, how the people went on with their lives around the Mishkan, and how they gathered inside of it, too. As the Torah tells us, this was an act of love, one done from the heart, and the final product inspired love and togetherness too.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) Following Cantor Mutlu’s interpretation, we draw close to the people and things we care about, and the efforts we engage in whole-heartedly. Reflecting on your life, how has this played out in the places you’ve lived?
- (b) How has Central represented or embodied this idea for you?
- (c) Think about a time you’ve helped create or maintain another community like this one. What steps have you taken to establish or support this kind of culture?

Creating this kind of engagement and commitment in a communal effort requires intention and planning. Cantor Mutlu contrasts the successful building of the Mishkan with the earlier disastrous incident of the Golden Calf. He notes the lack of willingness in the offerings that go to create the Golden Calf:

<p>Exodus 32</p> <p>² Aaron said to them, “[You men,] take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.”</p>	<p>הִזָּהֵב נִזְמֵי פָּרְקוֹ, אֶהָרֵן, אֲלֵהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר ב וְהִבִּיאוּ; וּבְנִתֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם נְשִׁיכֶם בְּאֲזְנֵי אֶשֶׁר אֵלַי.</p>
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Cantor Mutlu notes:

So the people toss some earrings to Aaron so he could make something, anything; they didn’t really care what. And maybe Aaron did his best but he was a priest, not an artist, and I’m betting the results weren't much to look at. But never mind how it looked, it definitely didn’t inspire good behavior; actually, it was a complete disaster, and no wonder. The people hadn't contributed any time or talent to the project: they didn't take any pride in the thing that had been made. Instead, they let fear and panic get the best of them and as a result, they made something which led them to sin, acting in selfish and immoral ways.

When Moses later shares God’s instructions with the community, it is clear that a deeper intention is necessary for contributions to building the Mishkan, where God will dwell amongst the people:

<p>Exodus 35</p> <p>⁴ Moses said further to the whole community of Israelites: “This is what God has commanded: ⁵ Take from among you gifts to</p>	<p>יִשְׂרָאֵל-בְּנֵי עֵדֻת-כָּל-אֶל, מִנְּשָׂה וַיֹּאמֶר ד לֵאמֹר יְהוָה צִוָּה-אֶשֶׁר, הִדְבָּר זֶה :לֵאמֹר</p>
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<p>God; everyone whose heart is so moved shall bring them – gifts for God: gold, silver, and copper; ⁶ blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, and goats' hair; ⁷ tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood; ⁸ oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; ⁹ lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and the breastpiece.</p>	<p>לבו נָדִיב כָּל, לַיהוָה, תְּרוּמָה מֵאֲתָכֶם קָחוּ ה וּבְחֻשָׁת, וּבְכֶסֶף זָהָב :יְהוָה תְּרוּמַת אֶת יְבִיאָהּ וְעִזִּים וְשֵׁשׁ, שְׁנֵי וְתוֹלַעַת וְאַרְגָּמָן וּתְכֵלֶת ו וְעִצִּי, תְּחָשִׁים וְעֹרֹת מְאֻדָּמִים אֵילִם וְעֹרֹת ז שִׁטִּים. הַמְשֻׁחָה לְשֵׁמֶן וּבְשָׂמִים; לְמָאוֹר, וְשֵׁמֶן ח הַסַּמִּים וְלִקְטָרֶת. לְאַפֹּד :מְלֵאִים, וְאַבְנֵי--שֵׁהִם-וְאַבְנֵי ט וְלַחֲשׁוֹן.</p>
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In response to these very different instructions, Cantor Mutlu said, “The people started lining up with their finest possessions until they had donated so much, they had to be turned away.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) How were Aaron’s instructions different from those delivered by Moses?
- (b) What do you think contributed to the enthusiasm and investment of the people in following the instructions to build the Mishkan?
- (c) Cantor Mutlu’s close reading of the Golden Calf story recognizes that there were any numbers of things that Aaron and the people did that were wrong. What role did Aaron’s instructions play in ensuring the sinful nature of the Golden Calf?
- (d) When has someone asked you to give something in the manner that Aaron does? When has someone asked for something as Moses does Did you react or feel differently when you were asked in these different ways?
- (e) What implications might this have for how we ask those in our Central community to contribute?

Cantor Mutlu’s consideration of whole-hearted giving was prompted by an anecdote he told about his son:

One night I was reading my then 6 year old son a bedtime story. It had been a really long day and I was ready to get to bed myself. As I stumbled to get the words of the story out, he quickly interrupted me, “Come on dad, read with some feeling!”

Oh man, I thought to myself, he's on to me—and he's not going to let me off easy, so I asked him, "so how do I do that?" and then he said,

"I don't know, just read from your heart." Of course, I was blown away and completely inspired by his response, and when I read his bedtime story, it was easy to read with lots of feeling.

Based on what we learned from the example of the Mishkan, two things had to happen to prompt this reaction from Cantor Mutlu. First, his son had to ask in a way that inspired Cantor Mutlu to openly give – and he did this by pulling at his father's heartstrings. Second, Cantor Mutlu had to be receptive to the request that was put forth to him.

With the Golden Calf, the gold is offered, one way or another. The offerings for the Mishkan, however, are required to be given willingly – or not at all.

In life and in our communities, we are regularly asked to give of ourselves and our resources. We have little control over how these requests are made, but we do have within ourselves the ability to open or close ourselves off from these requests.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- (a) Reflecting on your own responses to requests, do you tend to follow the example of the Mishkan, giving openheartedly or not at all, or the Golden Calf, giving when asked, but not always willingly or whole-heartedly?
- (b) Cantor Mutlu sets up the paradigm of the Mishkan as the ideal. Do you agree? Is this something to strive towards? If so, what can we do to encourage our own openheartedness?