

Take for Me a Contribution

What does it mean to give a contribution to a synagogue? This is an exceptionally poignant lesson with the new tax bill where people are less likely to itemize and get a tax deduction from their donation. Often we think that we've earned what is ours; our Torah portion teaches us otherwise. The reading begins דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה, speak to the children of Israel and take **for me** a contribution (for the building of the Mishkan, or G-d's home).¹ Why is the word לי, or "for me," written? Why does G-d need a contribution for G-dself?

Rashi, our commentator par excellence, writes that the word לי means לשמי that we are giving for the sake of G-d's name.² This leaves more to be answered. Wouldn't any gift be for G-d's name? Siftei Hachamim (Shabbetai Bass 1641-1718 Kalisz, Poland), a supercommentator on Rashi, writes דהא כל דבר שבעולם, שלו הוא, that everything in the world is for G-d.³ In other words, don't think that you're master of your own destiny; rather everything you have is a gift

¹ Exodus 25:2

² Rashi on Exodus 25:2 ד"ה ויקחו לי תרומה

³ Siftei Hachamim on Rashi Exodus 25:2 ד"ה ויקחו לי לשמי

from G-d, and you should give back from the gifts G-d has given you. However, it is supposed to be contribution that one is willing to give because, in the words of Rabbi Yitzhak Karo (uncle of Yosef Karo), “There are those who contribute, not from their own hearts but rather from the hearts of others, meaning that they see others contributing and therefore contribute on account of shame.”⁴ The goal of giving is to do so freely, without looking around at what others are doing.

We can use the immense resources that G-d has bestowed upon us to strengthen ourselves, but then it dies with us. When we use them to strengthen a house for G-d, they will live on eternally. Midrash Aggadah continues on this theme, asserting אמר הקב"ה לישראל: התנדבו ועשו המשכן, ⁵ ואל תאמרו מכיסכם אתם נותנים דבר, כי משלי הוא הכל. לפיכך אמר ויקחו לי-משלי. The Midrash understands ‘give to me’ as saying give from what is mine. Tzeror Hamor (Rabbi Abraham Saba, 1440-1508 Castille) continues on this theme, highlighting why it says “take for me a contribution” as opposed to “give me.” He wrote that when we give tzedakah “we are

⁴ רבי יצחק קארו שמות כב:ב ד"ה דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה

⁵ Translation G-d said to Israel ‘Give voluntarily to construct the Mishkan. Don’t say you’re giving from your pockets, for everything comes from me. Therefore, say ‘give for me,’ that is to say what is from me.’

actually not giving, but rather taking and receiving...everything that one acquires in this world, except Torah and mitzvot will eventually belong to others...only concerning Torah and mitzvot does one truly acquire for himself.”⁶

What are we doing this year to grow in getting closer to G-d? Are we taking on additional *Mitzvot*? Are we setting additional time for Torah study? How can we increase the devotion of our time, energy and resources to strengthening our connection with G-d?

We are blessed to have a very powerful person joining us to enhance our connection with G-d through the sacred music of prayer. It is such a blessing to be able to welcome in Cantor Kenneth Cohen our new hazzan, who functions as *shaliach tzibur*, our intermediary before G-d in prayer. I look forward to partnering with and learning from Cantor Cohen as he brings innovative approaches in sacred music to our congregation, and his davening will help us reach closer to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (G-d). His knowledge and wisdom will help us grow as a

⁶ צרור המור שמות כב:ב ד"ה ואמר ויקחו לי תרומה

spiritual community, and we welcome him into our congregational family.

In order to fully celebrate Cantor Cohen's arrival at the Jericho Jewish Center, please turn with me in the Siddur to Page 826. This is a prayer for Welcoming New Members but I am going to change the beginning of it to fit this special occasion. We will follow this with recitation of the Shehehaynu at the bottom of Page 828.