

PARASHAT NASO

Dear Chavraya,

All gifts of the heart that are offered sincerely in the service of God are of equal value. Whether gifts of hand or heart or spirit, when offered according to one's ability to help build and sustain a holy community, the giver is equally beloved of God, and so in the community should each be of the other. This is a lesson that is taught beautifully in this week's Torah portion, *parashat Naso*. It is a lesson, however, that might easily be overlooked.

One of my delights in learning and teaching Torah is to open up an apparently dull, boring passage and find gems gleaming beneath the surface. So in *Naso*, the prince of each of the twelve tribes of Israel brings a gift on behalf of the tribe for the dedication of the desert sanctuary, the *mishkan*. The gifts are enumerated in great detail, great boring, dull detail; "one silver dish one hundred and thirty shekels in weight, one silver sprinkling basin seventy shekels by the weight standard of the Sanctuary, both filled with fine wheat flour mixed with oil for a homage offering; one spoon weighing ten shekels of gold, filled with incense; one young bull, one ram, one sheep..." and on and on. So is the gift of each tribe enumerated. If we stick with it and continue reading beyond the gift of the first prince, and then maybe on to the second or third, we start to notice the emerging lesson, which is the greatest gift of all. Every single one of the twelve princes, on behalf of every one of the twelve tribes has brought exactly the same gift, down to the smallest detail!

None of the princes wanted to overshadow another. In the service of God, there is to be no competition. The Slonimer Rebbe offers a beautiful teaching on why the Torah enumerates in such recurrent detail the gift of each tribe: "Each prince invested in his offering the way of thinking and heartfelt intention that was unique to his tribe.... The deed is not the main thing, rather, it is the thought...." The Slonimer concludes his teaching by saying that "every tribe and every individual has great things to bring to fruition in the world."

May we all bring to our community and to the world our own unique gifts, at times spiritual, at times material. Honoring each other, so may we help bring to fruition that time when all of the tribes of humanity shall dedicate in peace the great sanctuary of Earth that we all share.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor