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What Gifts Do You Bring?
Delivered February 12, 2016

What if you had the power to bring Godliness into all corners of your being?

You do.

Let me explain.

This week we turn from the many ways we are to walk in God's ways to what gifts the people may offer for building the Mishkan: the portable place place of incomparable holiness where God will dwell among the Children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings.

Unlike the language from last week which used the "you will" commands to mold the people to live a life in covenantal relationship with the God of Israel, this week Torah invites the Children of Israel to participate in creating the mishkan. They are invited to freely give the materials to create a place for God to dwell among them in a radically immanent way.

Wow.

The One who has just redeemed this people from slavery, the One who initiated the revelatory moment at Sinai, now speaks to Moses saying:

"Speak to the Children of Israel,
that they may take me a gift;

"From every person ***whose heart so moves him***, you are to take my contribution.

"And this is the contribution that you are to take from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue-violet, purple, and worm-scarlet (yarn), byssus, and goats'-hair, rams' skins dyed-red, tanned-leather skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for oil of anointing and for fragrant smoking-incense, onyx stones, stones for setting for the *efod* and for the breastpiece.

"Let them make me a Holy-shrine that I may dwell amidst them." (Ex. 25:1-8)

Our hearts, so often used in reference to the love relationship, is used here, too, to foster the love relationship between the community of Israel and our God. (And no, this week's parasha is not related to that other love day that many people will celebrate on Sunday).

Here, each person is given the opportunity to participate as their heart prompts them.

What a wonderful creative enterprise to enfranchise the entire community: offer your gifts to create a place for Me to dwell among you, the people.

Instead of the commanding God so familiar to us, God shares with Moses that to make God's presence real to everyone, you cannot order them to do to it. Rather, you have to invite them in so that each person has the opportunity to contribute all that is necessary to realize this portable holy place.

The list, you may recall, is pretty detailed. In delineating all of the required items you might even say that the first gift registry is from the Torah, an idea created long before modern retail!

You might ask yourself: where did they get the gold, silver, and bronze, the jewels, and the fine fabrics being asked of them? Recall that as the Israelites were escaping Egypt, so quickly that the bread did not have time to rise, there was still time for the Egyptians to freely give them all sorts of deluxe items, items that one would think would not be part of a former slave's household goods. (Ex. 11:2-3)

A few weeks ago I spoke about how God hardened Pharaoh's heart and the many ways we use heart in our spoken vernacular today.

Torah is now using it in a profound way, too: "let those whose heart so moves them." This is to say that altruism, the volunteering of yourself, be it treasure or time, is freely offered, it is your heart "moving you."

Which leads to us in the here and now. Since our ancestors in the wilderness responded overwhelmingly, in this particular moment, to what was voluntarily requested of them, you might ask yourself, what are your gifts? What does your heart move you to share?

Each of us by virtue of our humanity has our own special qualities that translate to the gift of our being present in the world.

Think about how you relate to all of your worlds: your parents, your spouse, your siblings, your children, your grandchildren, your friends, people who are in need.

There is not a person alive who is not uniquely talented, shaped by life's experiences, to have an array of gifts to share.

Take a moment to think about what your gifts might be.

Now take another moment to think about how you share them.

Ask yourself: am I sharing my gifts adequately or are there areas I need to explore further where I can spread my gifts more widely?

Think about what is being asked of the Children of Israel: share your gift if your heart so moves.

Sharing of ourselves, of our gifts, is one of the most tangible way we bring our understanding of God into the world: to our lives, to the lives of others.

More than the portable mishkan in the wilderness, we are able, wherever we find ourselves, to allow God to dwell in our acts when we share our unique gifts.

In so doing we make the entire experience of our lives a place for God to dwell among us.