

# Parsha: Terumah

By Rabi Yitzchok Aryeh Strimber

*Shemot/Exodus 25:1-27:19*

In the beginning of this week's Torah reading, the Torah lists all the materials that were necessary to be donated for the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). All the way on the bottom of the list, the avnei shoham are mentioned. These are the precious stones that were to be inserted in the Choshen and Efod, the special adornments worn by the Kohen Gadol (the high priest). It would seem surprising that the avnei shoham were listed last, being that they are the most valuable items of all the other ones mentioned, in contrast to gold and silver which are on the top of the list.

The Ohr Hachaim takes note of this and offers the following insight: The Talmud tells us (Yoma 75a) that these special jewels were supplied to them in a miraculous fashion by the means of clouds. Since these materials were granted to them directly from Heaven for this use, and they were not acquired or produced through any effort, it was considered to be the least significant donation. All the other items required either physical labor or at least a monetary expense for the donor, while these stones were delivered on a silver platter for this purpose and did not cost the donors anything.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (in Sichos Mussar) cites this as an example of a fundamental principle in how deeds are assessed in Heaven. While we might measure the significance of a deed based on the value of what it produced, in Heaven there exists a whole different value system. In Heaven, the level of significance is based on how much of a person's heart is invested in the deed, rather than the outcome of the deed itself. Thus, despite the fact that the Avnei Shoham possessed the greatest monetary value, the contribution of these items was least significant, since the donor wasn't personally invested in it. The other materials, despite being cheaper, required more sacrifice on the part of the people donating them. This inherently entailed their hearts being more invested in these contributions, and were therefore of higher value in the Eyes of Heaven.

In the seventeenth century, a rabbi once gave a lecture about the importance of the Lechem Hapanim – a special offering of bread which was brought on a weekly basis, at the time that the Holy Temple stood, which had great meaning in Heaven. One man was very inspired by the rabbi's words, and he decided that he was going to bring his own offering of Lechem Hapanim. From then on, every Friday afternoon, he would bring two freshly baked challahs to the synagogue, and place them in the ark. He was so excited about his new venture and the thought of once again bringing honor to his Creator with such an offering. He would beg God with tears in his eyes for his offering to be accepted. Every week, after Sabbath, he would go to the ark, and to his satisfaction, the loaves were gone. He was sure God had accepted them, and he was elated. One week, as he brought his bread to the synagogue, the rabbi happened to be there as well and witnessed the bizarre scene of this man placing challah in the ark. The rabbi's curiosity was piqued, and he asked the man for an explanation. The fellow excitedly told him about his project, and how God receives the bread from him every week. The rabbi sought to enlighten him and told him how such a deed cannot substitute for the offerings that were brought in the Holy Temple, and God certainly was not taking the challahs. "But I have proof!" insisted the man, "Every week I check and I see that they are gone!" The rabbi told him to wait with him in the synagogue and see what happens. Sure enough, soon after, the shamas walked in, went to the ark, and took the challah home to enjoy. The man was shattered upon seeing his illusion burst in front of his eyes, and never again did he place bread in the ark. A short while later, the Arizal approached the rabbi and told him that it was revealed to him in a dream that in Heaven they are extremely unhappy with him. God had not received such pleasure as He did from this unassuming, misguided offering, since the destruction of the Holy Temple. And because of what this rabbi did, the man ceased his practice.

This thought may be difficult to put into practice, but it certainly could be very uplifting. In this world, we are used to placing value and meaning in accordance with what meets the eye. What meets the eye is the results produced. But that's not how matters are viewed in Heaven. In Heaven, the primary gauge of merit is the amount a person invests his heart in his deeds. A simple accomplishment done full-heartedly, surpasses by all means a big achievement devoid of personal investment and sacrifice. While at times, we may not merit to produce monumental results, we must bear in mind that it's not the

product that really counts. It's the degree of investment of heart and soul into the deed that counts.