

## And when you will make an Altar of stones for Me, do not build them hewn. (20:22)

*Rashi* quotes the *Mechilta* where Rabbi Yishmael says: Every example of *im* (usually translated as if), in the Torah is referring to something which is optional, except for three times. The first of them is the above *pasuk* in which the *im* is not discretionary, but rather, translated as “when” you will build an Altar; the second instance (*Shemos* 22:4), is concerning lending money, *im kesef talveh es ami*, “if” you lend money, would be the incorrect translation since one must lend money. Hence, it is read “when” you will lend money. Last, is *v'im takriv Minchas Bikurim* (*Vayikra* 2:14); the *pasuk* cannot mean “if” you will bring a *Minchas* (meal-offering) of *Bikurim*, since the Torah is referring to the *Minchas Omer* which is an obligation. Apparently, these three cases of “*im*” are not conditional, but rather, absolute, and therefore the interpretation of *im* is “when”. While this is all good and well, why would the Torah employ a word that implies discretionary when, in fact, it is an obligation? *Mizbayach*, lending money and *Minchas HaOmer* are obligatory; why use a term that implies conditional?

**Horav Zev Weinberg, Shlita**, explains that there are many activities which are obligatory in nature, but should nonetheless be carried out in such a manner that it appears that the individual is doing it out of a sense of option and generosity. This is especially true with regard to acts of kindness, which are albeit compulsory, but should be expressed with love and a desire to assist someone in need. When there is an appeal for assistance, and a person writes out his check as if he is about to take some bitter medicine, it takes away from the beauty and spirit of the *mitzvah*.

Likewise, when one offers his first fruits to Hashem, it should not be brought as something requisite, but out of a feeling of excitement – expressing one’s good will and joy in being able to give back and express his gratitude to the Almighty. Similarly, when one builds a *Mizbayach* upon which he will bring his offerings to Hashem, it should be with a sense of beneficence – not compulsion.