

Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them take for Me a terumah/tithing/portion, from every man whose heart motivates him. (25:2)

Nedivas ha'lev, a donation from the sincerity of one's heart, is the loftiest level of generosity. It is easy to write a check – if one has the money to back it. Easy come – easy go. Generosity of the heart demands sincerity; it is not about the amount of money that one gives. It is how much of himself he gives with that money. The purity of money is based upon the sincerity behind it. When one seeks to establish an abode for Hashem, a place where the Divine Presence will repose, it must be the result of funds that are spiritually and ethically pure, that emanate from an individual whose desire to participate in this davar she'bikedushah, holy endeavor, is sincere. The following story underscores this idea.

Horav Avraham Yaakov, zl, m'Sadiger, was one of the nineteenth centuries' chassidic Rebbes. Chassidim flocked to him from all over Europe. His shul was a majestic edifice which looked like the palace of a king. Its entrance way was flanked by two large pillars. Its windows were colorful works of art in stained glass. One ascended wide marble steps on the outside of the shul prior to entering the cavernous sanctuary in which 3,000 people were able to sit. Its walls were hand-painted with artwork that was surrounded by the finest wood. Hundreds of candelabras, which illuminated the shul, provided a well-lit and relaxed backdrop for prayer.

The Sadigerer Rebbe was the son of the Rizhiner Rebbe, who felt that his son possessed the neshamah, soul, of the Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh. The Rebbe was challenged by much adversity, emerging each time stronger and holier. Indeed, following each challenge, his chassidic following would increase and expand. Tzaddikim would comment that the very holiness of the Rebbe was contagious.

Now, for the story behind the magnificent shul of Sadiger. Amongst the Rebbe's thousands of chassidim was a poverty-stricken melamed, Torah teacher. He lived in a tiny village far from the beaten path of mainstream chassidim. He had heard so much about the Rebbe that it became his dream, his obsession, that he must travel there to give the Rebbe a kvitel, written petition, accompanied by his pidyon, donation. Unfortunately, it was easier said than done. Since the man was so poor, it took an entire year until he had saved up one ruble (a small, almost insignificant sum) to bring to the Rebbe.

The man left for his trip, which took quite some time, considering that his two legs were his only means of conveyance. After he finally arrived at the Rebbe's house, the gabbai, Rebbe's secretary, told him that the earliest possible time to meet with the Rebbe was Friday night following davening, when the Rebbe greeted all the guests who had come for Shabbos. The melamed was grief-stricken. After saving and scrounging for a year, he finally had a pidyon, money. This was followed by a long, difficult and tiring journey. All of that for what? To be told that he should wait in line Friday night with all the guests.

Our melamed had reached his breaking point. He felt that had he had money or had been dressed in more impressive attire, he might have been welcomed by the gabbai in a more embracing manner. This is life, and the movers and the shakers are treated differently. The melamed,

however, just could not wait any longer. He had a meltdown. Tears streamed down his cheeks, as he began to relate his tale of woe to the gabbai. Sadly, the gabbai heard such stories a few times each day. People came from all over to petition the Rebbe's blessing. Everyone was experiencing some form of adversity; everyone was in need of a yeshuah, some form of salvation.

The melamed would not be stilled, to the point that his incessant weeping reached the Rebbe's ears. After inquiring of his gabbai concerning the source of commotion, he instructed the gabbai to show the melamed into his study. When the melamed entered the room and gazed upon the Rebbe's holy countenance, he almost passed out. Finally, he gathered up his courage and related to the Rebbe that he had saved all year to bring his one ruble pidyon to the Rebbe. He then asked the Rebbe for his blessing:

The Rebbe accepted the man's coin, held it for a moment, then said, "You may have this coin back. Use it however you want. It will bring blessing and success to anyone who will use it." The melamed graciously thanked the Rebbe and left. When word got out that the Rebbe had blessed the man's coin, everyone wanted to purchase it. Soon, a public auction was held during which the one - ruble coin blessed by the Rebbe sold for 10,000 ruble! The Rebbe's blessing had achieved fruition. That is not, however, the end of the story.

The melamed immediately returned to the Rebbe's home. This time he was not asked to wait. He was now a member of the elite. Although still attired in his beggar's garb, the money jingling in his pocket more than made up for his lack of impressive attire. The gabbai ushered him in as soon as the Rebbe was available.

"Rebbe!" the melamed said excitedly. "The Rebbe's brachah materialized! I immediately was able to sell my ruble for more money than I ever dreamed of. Now, I would like to give the Rebbe maaser, one tenth (tithe) of my earnings. I am overjoyed to do this!"

The Rebbe looked at the melamed and was silent for a moment. Finally, he spoke, "For a while now I have been thinking of building a new, large bais hamedrash to glorify Hashem. This should be a bais hamedrash that would inspire prayer, where people would feel comfortable to spend time. I wanted the money that would pay for this edifice to be the result of ahavas Hashem, love of the Almighty, and from the generosity of one's heart. The money that you have given me serves as the perfect donation for this cause." This is how the magnificent shul came into being.