Parashat Vayakhel: What We Can Give

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Shemot 35:21	
וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נָשָׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר נָדְבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה לִמְלֶאכֶת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּלְכָל־עֲבֹדָתוֹ וּלְבִגְדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ:	And everyone who excelled in ability and everyone whose spirit was moved came, bringing to GOD an offering for the work of the Tent of Meeting and for all its service and for the sacral vestments.

1. **Who Gives And Why**

Ramban on Shemot 35:21	
וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ עַל הַחֲכָמִים הָעוֹשִׂים בַּמְּלָאכָה יֹאמַר כֵּן, כִּי לֹא מָצִינוּ עַל הַמִּתְנַדְּבִים נְשִׂיאוּת לֵב, אֲבָל יַזְכִּיר בָּהֶם נְדִיבוּת. וְטַעַם **אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ**, לְקָרְבָה אֶל הַמְּלָאכָה, כִּי לֹא הָיָה בָּהֶם שֶׁלָּמַד אֶת הַמְּלָאכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה מִמְּלַמֵּד, אוֹ מִי שֶׁאִמֵּן בָּהֶן יָדָיו כְּלָל, אֲבָל מָצָא בְּטִבְעוֹ שֶׁיֵּדַע לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן, וַיִּגְבַּהּ לִבּוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי ה' (דה"ב יז ו) לָבֹא לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר לוֹ אֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אֲדֹנִי דּוֹבֵר. וּכְבָר הִזְכַּרְתִּי זֶה בַּסֵּדֶר הָאַחֵר (רמב"ן על שמות ל"א:ב'). וְהִנֵּה אָמַר שֶׁבָּאוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נְשָׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ לְקָרְבָה אֶל הַמְּלָאכָה, וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר נָדְבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ הַתְּרוּמָה, וְהִנֵּה מֹשֶׁה אָמַר לְכֻלָּם כִּי קָרָא ה' בְּשֵׁם בְּצַלְאֵל וְאָהֳלִיאָב (שמות ל"ה:ל'), וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן קָרָא לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל כָּל חֲכַם לֵב (שמות ל"ו:ב') שֶׁיָּבוֹאוּ לְפָנָיו וְנָתַן לָהֶם הַנְּדָבָה:	**And they came everyone whose heart stirred up:** This is said with reference to the wise men who did the work, for we do not find the use of this phrase, “the stirring up of the heart,” in connection with those who merely brought the donations; Scripture rather mentions “generosity of heart” with reference to them. Now the reason for using such a phrase, *whose heart stirred him up*, is because they undertook to do the work, although there was no one amongst them who had learned these crafts from an instructor, or had trained his hands at all to do them. Rather, a person who felt in his nature that he knew how to do such skills, *his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Eternal* to come before Moses and say to him, “I will do all that my lord speaks.” I have already mentioned this in another section. Thus Scripture is stating that there came before Moses *every one whose heart stirred him up* to undertake the work, *and every one whom his spirit made willing* brought the offering. Then Moses said to all of them that *G-d had called by name Bezalel*, *and Oholiab*. Afterward Moses called them *and every wise-hearted man* to come before him, and he gave them the whole donation [brought by the people so that they could proceed to do the work].

Tur HaArokh on Shemot 35:21	
ויבאו כל איש אשר נשאו לבו. כ' הרמב"ן בנדבה כתב אשר נדבו לבו ולא כתב בה נשיאות כאשר כתב בעושי המלאכה לפי שלא הי' מי שלמד המלאכה ממלמד או מי שאימן ידו בה לעשותה אלא מי שמצא בטבעו שידע לעשות ויגבה לבו	**And they came everyone whose heart stirred up:** Ramban draws our attention to the change in expression here. In connection with the donations, (25,2) the Torah had described the individual’s motivation with the words אשר נדבנו לבו, “whose heart motivates him,” whereas here we are told about a different level of generosity, enthusiasm, i.e. אשר נשאו לבו, “whose heart inspired him.” Men who had no

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

בדרכי ה' לבא לפני משה לאמר לו אני אעשה כל אשר אדוני דובר ולכך הזכיר בה נשיאות לב:	training in performing any of these tasks were inspired and suddenly were able to perform tasks they had never considered themselves capable of performing. Artisans who were skilled in performing tasks but had never trained others to do so, now became skilled at teaching their art, and men or women who had never displayed skill with their hands were suddenly inspired to do so. They came to Moses volunteering to perform the tasks that were required.

Or Ha-Hayyim on Shemot 35:21	
ויבאו כל איש אשר נשאו וגו'. פירוש אומרו **נשאו לבו ונדבה** וגו', דע כי יש שתי הדרגות במתנדבים, הא' הוא המתנדב ברצון נפשו כפי יכולתו וערך ממונו, ולזה יקרא נדבה רוחו לשלול שאינו עושה הדבר כמו צער בנפשו, והב' הוא המתנדב יותר מיכולתו מגודל טוביות לבו, ולזה יקרא נשאו לבו פירוש שהלב מנשאהו ומעריכו בערך עשיר יותר ממה שהוא לתת דבר יקר, ולזה אמר כי בישראל נמצאו ב' סוגים הנזכרים…	**ויבאו כל איש ישראל אשר נשאו לבו, Every Israelite whose heart had elevated him came, brought, etc.** The Torah alludes to two different categories of donors. 1) A person who donates as a result of an urge to do so in accordance with his means, both physically and financially. The Torah describes such a person as נדבה רוחו, to stress that such a donor does not feel that he deprives himself of something by giving it away. 2) The second type of donor is one who loses his sense of proportion because of his enthusiasm for the project for which he donates. As a result he contributes more than he can afford. The Torah describes this second type of person as נשאו לבו, "he is carried away by his heart." At the time he donates, such a person considers himself as possessing far more economic resources than he actually does. The Torah spoke of both of these types in our verse to show that there were both of these kinds of donors among the Israelites.

2. The Life You Can Save

Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: How To Do Your Part to End World Poverty*, 22-24
On your way to work, you pass a small pond. On hot days, children sometimes play in the pond, which is only about knee-deep. The weather's cool today, though, and the hour is early, so you are surprised to see a child splashing about in the pond. As you get closer, you see that it is a very young child, just a toddler, who is flailing about, unable to stay upright or walk out of the pond. You look for the parents or babysitter, but there is no one else around. The child is unable to keep her head above the water for more than a few seconds at a time. If you don't wade in and pull her out, she seems likely to drown. Wading in is easy and safe, but you will ruin the new shoes you bought only a few days ago, and get your suit wet and muddy. By the time you hand the child over to someone responsible for her, and change your clothes, you'll be late for work. What should you do?
…Now think about your own situation. By donating a relatively small amount of money, you could save a child's life. Maybe it would take more than the amount needed to buy a pair of shoes, but we all spend money on things we don't really need, whether on drinks, meals out, clothing, movies, concerts, vacations, new cars, or house renovations. Is it possible that by choosing to spend your money on such things rather than contributing to an effective charity, you are leaving a child to die, a child you could have saved?

Big Question: How might these commentaries on our parasha be a good model for thinking about when and how to give? How might they not be?