By JR

Parashat vaYakhel-P'kudei, Exodus 35:1 – 40:38

1. Bring Excellent Offerings.

And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit made him willing, and brought Adonai's offering for the work on the tent of meeting, for the service in it and for the holy garments. Both men and women came, as many as had willing hearts; they brought nose-rings, earrings, signet-rings, belts, all kinds of gold jewelry – everyone bringing an offering of gold to Adonai. Sh'mot 35:21-22

What do people give to your synagogue? What do they donate? Do you find that people bring leftovers from garage sales to hang on the walls? Or do they bring pieces of art that you wish you could hang in your home? Do you find half-eaten, half-frozen dishes of food contributed to the oneg? Does someone bring a stale bag of chips? Or do you find food on the oneg table that clearly was prepared with diligence and love?

What do YOU bring to synagogue?

I know full well that I have brought the good, the bad, and the ugly into our synagogue.

And when I (or you) do this I think it reveals our selfish hearts. We are showing that we don't really understand the economy of God. We don't really understand that it all belongs to Him already. We may even be revealing that we do not even know the depth of our own selfishness. We are exposing that we think that these things (our food, our money, our art, our time, our

strength, our fill-in-the-blank) belong to us.

In the words of my two-year-old son, “Mine!”

The gifts I bring can lay bare my self-centric, possession focused, consumeristic life.

And yet, for a tithe to actually BE a tithe it can never be second best. And offerings? Offerings to a holy God were never intended to be leftovers!

What does God say instead?

You must offer a male without defect. Vayikra 1:3

Adonai said to Moshe, “Set aside for me all the firstborn. Whatever is first from the womb among the people of Isra’el, both of humans and of animals, belongs to me.” Sh’mot 13:1

If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offerings, then, if he offers before Adonai an animal from the herd, then no matter whether it is male or female, it must be without defect. Vayikra 3:1

All I’m trying to say is this:

Bringing ANYTHING as a tithe or offering – be it money, food, manual labor ... whatever – is WORSHIP!

We should let our hearts be stirred!

We should let our spirits make us willing!

We should engage in the deep, deep worship and spiritual act of bringing gifts into the House of Adonai!

Bring fine things! (As you are able – if you are not able, God will give you other ways to worship.)

Bring FIRST fruits!

Bring the excellence of your life!

Bring it as worship before a Holy God!

Your stuff, your strength, your time, your money, your VERY LIFE ... they are not yours. They are gifts that you have freely received.

And in light of God's mercy in our lives, let us offer ourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please Him; it is the logical "Temple Worship" for us. Romans 12:1

Selah.

2. Worship > Davening, Singing, Dancing, Reading, etc...

Worship is greater than whatever springs to our minds when we say the word “worship.” In fact, if our lives are living acts of worship before God, why do these specific activities even come to mind when we say “worship?” Worship is so much more!

“See, Adonai has singled out B’tzal’el the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Y’hudah. He has filled him with the Spirit of God - with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge concerning...

...singing?

...dancing?

...delivering a drash?

...mentoring?

...healing the sick?

Nope. None of the above.

“...concerning every kind of artisanry. He is a master of design in gold, silver, bronze, cutting precious stones to be set, woodcarving and every other craft.” Sh’mot 35:30-32

So, how did we take on the idea that worship is davening? Why do people use the word “worship” interchangeably with “singing”?

Do you have some people in your congregation that just can’t seem to “get into” liturgical

prayer? Do you have others who have a hard time with singing? Do you have some who would NEVER dance as worship to God?

And yet, do they come alive when they sew curtains for the congregational windows? Do they love scrubbing toilets so that others are blessed when using the restrooms? Do they enjoy working with children? Does graphic design move their heart as though it were a noble song?

You see where I'm headed. We need to stop defining worship in narrow categories.

God doesn't. God receives our entire life as worship.

Think about that for a second. Let it sink in. EVERYTHING you do is worship.

EVERYTHING.

That person that you judge for not "worshipping" on Shabbat may in fact be literally ANOINTED BY GOD to worship through painting, talking to people at parties, surfing, running, acting in plays, etc.

Let's throw our narrow categories for worship at the feet of God in surrender.

Do we as communities give people opportunities to worship outside of our little boxes? I hope we do. And if we're not let's fight to change that!

A couple of things that I am NOT saying:

I’m not giving anyone permission to neglect participation in corporate worship!

People’s lack of participation in prayer, singing, dancing, etc. does NOT often flow out of a permission from God. It flows much more often out of fear. I have seen this time and time again as a worship leader. We all allow fear to move us to some extent. Fear of what others will think. Fear of losing control. Fear of death.

We also can have prejudices that keep us from meaningfully engaging in corporate worship (worship must include certain chords, dances must look specific ways, etc.) Or we may have a desire for control. Or a million other motivations...

Let’s also lay these motivations and fears at the feet of God in surrender.

Let’s expect more of one another in corporate worship settings. I do not believe that God is pleased when we allow one another to “lazy out” during a service. Let us endeavor to hold one another to excellence in corporate worship! And let us be unfailingly careful to allow the Spirit of the Living God to move our hearts when we are to speak to a brother or sister about such things.

Don’t judge. Don’t speak. Don’t move. Don’t even breathe a word of correction unless you are CERTAIN that God has given you permission to do so.

Who knows? That same person that you want to rebuke might be anointed to cut precious stones...

Selah.

3. Nothing Matters Unless God Shows Up.

Finally, he erected the courtyard around the tabernacle and the altar and set up the screen for the entrance to the courtyard. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Adonai filled the tabernacle. Moshe was unable to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud remained on it, and the glory of Adonai filled the tabernacle. Sh'mot 40:33-35

I don't care what kind of building your synagogue has. I don't care how incredible (or un-incredible) your ark is. I don't care if you have 17 Torah scrolls with their individual coverings ornately jeweled and each wearing a crown – or if you don't even have one Sefer Torah. I don't care if you have a 20 piece band that can modulate instantly if their leader winks in a special way. I don't care if everyone in your synagogue is fluent in Hebrew.

Is the presence of the Living God thick in your "tent of meeting"?

Is God so real in your midst that people can hardly enter the door?

That is what we should care about. This above all things must be our desire! HE must be our desire! We must long for Him to be real in our midst so that we can love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength!

But how do we do that? How do we get God to show up ... as if we could create the right environment that would be perfect for Him!

No...

It can never work that way. God alone choses to move in the midst of His people. He is not so small that we could create the right circumstances for Him.

No...

What then do we do?

Obey.

The altar for burnt offerings he (Moshe) placed at the entrance to the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering, ***as Adonai had ordered Moshe.*** Sh'mot 40:28-29

Surrender your will. Listen, and obey.

He (Moshe) set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing ... ***as Adonai had ordered Moshe.*** Sh'mot 40:30-32

There is only one way that we can create an environment in which God would delight: We can obey, each of us individually, together corporately, locked in obedience to the Living God. It is HE alone who both orchestrates AND receives our prayers as sweet incense before His throne!

Let's all obey God and see what happens!

Wouldn't THAT be a Shabbat to be remembered?!