

This Week's Text

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מְרִבִּים הָעָם לְהָבִיא מִדֵּי הָעֵבֶדָה לְמַלְאכָה אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵתָּה:
...they spoke to Moses, saying: ‘The people bring more than enough for the work which Adonai commanded us.’

Linking Our Text to Modern Israel

Your donation is way too large; we don't need that much. Said no one, ever! Yet the builders of the First Temple expressed exactly this in this week's torah portion. We read in Vayakhel that an overabundance of donations funded the artisans tasked with creating the sanctuary. It seems that renewed energy and the promise of this holy place breathed life into the Israelite people as they began to envision and really believe that they would be at the forefront of creating a new community with a promising destiny. The medieval commentator Nachmanides states that this passage demonstrates a wonderful synergy between inspiring leaders, willing donors, and honest workers, who in no way took advantage of the “extra” gifts brought to them by Israelites.

In contrast, there was NOT an overabundance of materials and funds for the modern State of Israel, in light of the limited population of Jews around the world that supported the effort to create the modern state. Yet, a review of some of the earliest Zionist efforts and fiscal donations from the diaspora in the early 20th century shows a parallel to the eagerness demonstrated by the ancients in this week's biblical narrative.

Like a modern day Moses, David Ben-Gurion inspired people to build something from nothing. He emphasized the development of the Negev as key to Israel's growth. “We want only to rebuild what has been ruined and to make the desert bloom... With our own hands we have created, and will create in the future...” (Addressing the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly, May 4, 1948). Money streamed in from many donors - the World Zionist Organization, Jewish Federations, the American Jewish Committee, Joint Distribution Committee, and many other organizations that believed in the construction of the Jewish nation. Donations supported Israel's Jewish National Fund, schools, hospitals, and defense forces. For more about David Ben-Gurion from CIE, see <https://israeled.org/david-ben-gurion-arrives-jaffa/> and <https://israeled.org/ben-gurion-passes-away/>.

Additional Resources

Laura S. Schor, [The Best School in Jerusalem - Annie Landau's School for Girls, 1900–1960](#), Brandeis University Press



Just as important, people gave of themselves, eager to work to see the Jewish dream come to fruition as they joined forces to build, cultivate, and defend the land. An exemplar of giving was Aryeh Lova Eliav, who immigrated to Israel from Moscow in 1924. Lova, a ship commander, smuggled 2,000 Jews from Sweden to Israel in a process of “illegal” immigration of Holocaust survivors to Palestine. Then in the 1950’s, as a diplomat in the Israel Embassy in Moscow, he secretly contacted Jews: “Our principal endeavor was to bring hope to Jews. We printed tiny Bibles, tiny prayer books, we brought tallitot (prayer shawls) by the thousands...avoiding the watchful eyes of the GPU” (from his interview with The Jerusalem Post ’93). For more about Aryeh Lova Eliav see the following from Spielberg Jewish Film Archive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZIJ4oK4yPU> and the following from the Knesset archives http://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mk_eng.asp?mk_individual_id_t=255

Another, lesser known giver was Hannah (Annie) Landau (1873- 1945), principal of the Evelina de Rothschild School for Girls in Jerusalem. The school, founded and endowed by Claude Montefiore, provided education, shelter, and nourishment to impoverished young girls in pre-state Israel. Landau was outspoken and independent. She established ties with the mandatory officials, Jewish dignitaries, and the Mufti of Jerusalem. She shared her own wealth and used her connections to raise money for those in need, endeavors which enabled her to purchase ten tons of food and clothing for the families of her pupils living in nearby communities.

In the biblical narrative, after the artisans’ pronouncement about the overabundance of gifts for the building of the sanctuary, Moses declared throughout the camp, “Men and women do not do more work on behalf of the gifts for the sanctuary.” And the people ceased bringing more; their efforts had been enough for the required work. The work of building and managing the State of Israel and the institutions within will never be complete. This is where the construction of the Temple and Israeli statebuilding differ. The efforts of those people tasked and concerned with shaping Israeli society will never remain static, as the people within the state and the world around it continue to grow and shift.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do Jews give their time and resources to support Israel?
2. When and why do we feel most inclined to give our support? In what ways can diaspora communities continue to support organizations and individuals today who have a role in building and shaping the country of Israel?