

CENTER FOR MODERN TORAH LEADERSHIP

Center for Modern Torah Leadership



חרות ואחריות

www.TorahLeadership.org

"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

DOES MIXED DONATING LEAD TO MIXED DANCING?

Rabbi Aryeh Klapper, Dean

Shemot 35:21-29 describes the response to Mosheh's Mishkan-appeal in a literary form that matches the action: sprawling, confused, spilling over from verse to verse. Here's my best effort to reduce this to a picture colored inside the lines. As you read, please pay close attention to gender markers.

וַיָּבֹאוּ
 כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁאַוּ לְבֹוֹ וְכָל־אִשָּׁרָה נְדָבָה רִחוּ אוֹתוֹ
 הֵבִיאוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמַת יִקְוֶה לְמַלְאכַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלְכָל־
 עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְלַבְגְּדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ:
 וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים עַל־הַנְּשִׁים
 כָּל־נְדִיב לֵב הֵבִיאוּ חָח וְזָמָם וְטַבַּעַת וְכוּמָז כָּל־כְּלִי
 זָהָב
 וְכָל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הָיָה הַיָּדָף תְּנוּפֶת זָהָב לִיקוּקָה: וְכָל־אִישׁ
 אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָא אוֹתוֹ תְּבַלְת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְנֹשֵׁשׁ
 וְעֵצִים וְעֹלֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹלֹת תְּחָשִׁים הֵבִיאוּ:
 כָּל־מְרִיִם תְּרוּמַת כֶּסֶף וְנִחָשֶׁת הֵבִיאוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַת
 יִקְוֶה!
 וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא אוֹתוֹ עֵצֵי שִׁטִּים לְכָל־מַלְאכַת הָעֲבֹדָה
 הֵבִיאוּ:
 וְכָל־אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת־לֵב בְּיָדֶיהָ טוֹו וַיָּבִיאוּ מְטוֹה אֶת־
 הַתְּכָלֶלֶת וְאוֹת־הָאַרְגָּמָן אֶת־תוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וְאוֹת־הַשֵּׁשׁ:
 וְכָל־הַנְּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר נָשָׂא לִגְוֹן אֶתְנָה בְּחֻמָּה טוֹו אֶת־
 הָעֵצִים:
 וְהַנְּשָׂאִים הֵבִיאוּ אֶת אֲבָנֵי הַשֹּׁהַם וְאוֹת אֲבָנֵי הַמַּלְאִים
 לְאַפֹּד וְלַחֹשֶׁן: וְאוֹת־הַבָּשָׂם וְאוֹת־הַשֶּׁמֶן לְמָאוֹר וְלַשֶּׁמֶן
 הַמְשֻׁחָה וְלַקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים:
 כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָדָב לְבָם אֶתֶם לְהֵבִיא לְכָל־
 הַמַּלְאכָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יִקְוֶה לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּיַד־מַנְּשֵׁה הֵבִיאוּ
 בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל נְדָבָה לִיקוּקָה:

They came,

every **man** who had been lifted by his heart
 and every? whose spirit had volunteered him
 brought the *terumah* of Hashem for the work of
 ohel moed and all its service and for the sacral
 garments.

The **men** came *al* the **women**

Every volunteering heart brought (**women's**
 jewelry) all golden artifacts
 and every **man** who had waved a wave-offering
 of gold before Hashem and every **man** with
 whom was found (precious materials and skins)

brought them)

Every? who was *merim a terumah* of silver or
 copper brought the *terumah* of Hashem
 and every? with whom was found acacia wood
 for all the work of the Mishkan brought
 and every **woman** wise-of-heart spun with her
 hands, and they brought spun the (precious
 fabrics)
 and all the **women** whose hearts had lifted them
 with wisdom spun the goats
 and the *nesi'im* brought the (precious stones) for
 the apron and breastplate, and the incense, and
 the oil for illumination, and for the anointing oil,
 and for the incense of many ingredients.
 Every **man** and **woman** whose hearts
 volunteered them to bring for all the work which
 Hashem commanded to be done via Mosheh
 Bnei Yisroel brought a volunteered-offering to
 Hashem

The same information could have been conveyed in a single
 declarative sentence or two, along the lines of: "All the men and
 women brought (list of expensive stuff). The *nesi'im* brought (list
 of other expensive stuff). It makes sense for the style to convey
 the disorderliness caused by the rush to give. But how are we to
 regard the apparent intermingling of the sexes? Specifically, what
 is conveyed by "The **men** came *al* the **women**"?

Modern Rabbinic readers can be forgiven for thinking that this
 is a double entendre intended to convey that the atmosphere
 included at least a tinge of the erotic. Nechamah Leibowitz
 explained the numerous double-meaning verbs in the scene of
 Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor as having that purpose;
 nothing happened **despite** their mutual attraction, not because
 they were unaware of each other as sexual beings. But Ibn
 Shoshan's concordance indicates that *ba* אֵל is a more common
 description of the sexual in Tanakh than *ba* עַל. My sense is that in
 Rabbinic Hebrew the homonym בעל/על became more
 prominent.

Ibn Ezra nonetheless provides three alternative readings.

וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים עַל הַנְּשִׁים = אַחַר שֶׁבָאוּ הַנְּשִׁים.

וַיֹּשֶׁ אֲוֹמְרִים: עַל דַּעַת הַנְּשִׁים, וְהַטַּעַם: בְּרִצּוֹנָם.

[וַיֹּשֶׁ מְפָרְשִׁים:] עַל כְּמוֹ: עַם, וְכַמוֹהוּ רַבִּים.

The men came al the women = after the women
 came.

But some say: al the mind of the women,
meaning in accordance with their will/
[and some say: al here means with, and there
are many others like it.

All three are linguistically reasonable. But they fail to capture the uniqueness of the phrasing. At the very least they need to be given depth, an explanation of why the Torah in this verse found it necessary to convey this information.

Let's begin by looking at the broader gender context. The Mishkan as presented in Vayakhel is plainly intended to atone for the Calf, and specifically the overwhelming response to the appeal parallels the response to Aharon's appeal for gold leading up to the calf. The Rabbis famously collected textual clues that only men responded to Aharon's appeal, to the point that they had to take their wives' jewelry by force.

So Ibn Ezra's first possibility is that Mosheh's appeal should be contrasted with Aharon's. Aharon drew an exclusively male response, whereas women were the first respondents to Mosheh, bringing the jewelry they had managed to protect from their husbands. The outstanding question is why the men are necessary at all. (Ramban defends the men's tardiness on the grounds that women were more likely to have their jewelry easily accessible.)

Ibn Ezra's second possibility is that only the men brought the jewelry, but this time – as opposed to the Calf episode – they brought them with their wives' advice and consent. Their response therefore reflected a deeply self-aware atonement, for both bringing the gold for the Calf and for stealing from their wives. The outstanding question is why the women are not present for this donation when they are present elsewhere in the same scene.

Keli Yakar provides an answer for both possibilities. The women were afraid that donating their jewelry would be taken as evidence of complicity in the calf. Therefore, they insisted that the men had to at least show up first (possibility 1), or refused to show up themselves at all (possibility 2).

Ibn Ezra's third possibility is that the men and women came together, but the women were central while the men came with them. This solves all the above issues – the men come as adjuncts to the women, thereby atoning for their prior high-handedness.

Some of the other commentaries along this line are hard to read. Seforno, for instance, suggests that the men were necessary because wives do not have the authority to make large donations without their husbands' consent. This is a Talmudic rule, but reflects the social/economic expectations of specific times and places. Siftei Chakhamim then misreads this back into Ibn Ezra's third possibility, and mid-19th century commentators HaKetav veHakabbalah and Malbim adopt it for themselves. I wonder whether these reflect a concern with making the laws about gender roles appear trans-temporal. Note however that Chatam Sofer emphasizes that both husbands and wives appeared because each has veto power over the other with regard to certain properties.

Perhaps before all the Ibn Ezran approaches became standard,

The mission of the Center for Modern Torah Leadership is to foster a vision of fully committed halakhic Judaism that embraces the intellectual and moral challenges of modernity as spiritual opportunities to create authentic leaders. The Center carries out its mission through the Summer Beit Midrash program, the Rabbis and Educators Professional Development Institute, the Campus and Community Education Institutes, weekly Divrei Torah and our website, www.torahleadership.org, which houses hundreds of articles and audio lectures.

Midrash Tanchuma was willing to take the physical description at face value.

בשעה שבא משה ואמר לישראל קחו מאתכם
תרומה - שמחו שמחה גדולה והביאו הנדבה
בשמחה ובזריזות.

ראה מה כתיב ויבאו האנשים על הנשים - שהיו דוחקין
זה על זה, שבאין האנשים והנשים בערבוביא . . .

At the time that Mosheh came and told
Israel *Take from yourselves terumah*,
they rejoiced greatly and brought *the*
volunteered-offering with joy and eagerness.
See what is written – *the men came al the
women* –

They were pushing each other, with the men
and women coming in a chaotic mixture . . .

Tanchuma offers no criticism of this scene, possibly because it does not see the language as implying anything erotic. However, another 19th century commentary, Igra d'Khala, argues that the language *al* was chosen specifically to show that a scene that would ordinarily be erotic was not, citing the famous Talmudic story (Ketubot 17a) of a rabbi who carried a bride during wedding-dancing and afterward defended himself by saying that in the moment, she might as well have been a block of wood.

By contrast, the Zohar offers a withering critique. It describes the angel of death among the women, so that Mosheh is compelled to call the men alone to a communal gathering in order to separate them from the women; and still the angel remains, until Mosheh assigns the men and women separate donation hours.

Or HaChayyim notices that the Zohar appears to suggest that women never heard the appeal directly from Mosheh. He gracefully rejects this implication and thus transforms the Zohar.

וימן הסתם לא יכחיש
שלא נודמנו הנשים לשמוע דבר ה'
ובפרט להביא נדבת המשכן
וכן הוא אומר ויבואו האנשים על הנשים
אלא יכוין לומר

כי הקהיל האנשים בפני עצמן והנשים בפני עצמן. . .

Presumably (the Zohar) would not deny
and claim that women were not invited to hear
the word of Hashem
especially with regard to bringing the volunteer-
offering for the Mishkan
and so Scripture says "*and the men came al the
women*"
rather (the Zohar) intends
that (Mosheh) congregated the men by
themselves and the women by themselves. . .

We would live in a different and better world if every claim for the necessity of separating the sexes because of *tzenuit* was tested against an irrefutable presumption that women must have equal direct access to *dvar Hashem* and its primary interpreters.

Shabbat Shalom!