

Show Me More than the Money: Giving Back Through Alternative Spring Break
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In the past few weeks we have read in Exodus about the building of the tabernacle as a visible, tangible symbol of God's ever-abiding Presence. God instructs Moses how to build the tabernacle and exactly how the community will contribute. In Exodus 30:15 the Lord asks for a contribution from the Israelite people. He says, "the rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving the Lord's offering." Then, in the following week's Parasha, Exodus 35, Moses says, "This is what the Lord has commanded: Take from among you gifts to the Lord; everyone whose heart so moves him shall bring them. And let all among you who are skilled come and make all that the Lord has commanded."

Why does God ask for the Israelites to bring a monetary donation as well as other contributions to the tabernacle?

It has been said that the reason God asks for only a half-shekel contribution, and then later asks for further donations, is that a person's obligation to his community must be greater than monetary contributions. One must also contribute his or her time and resources to the community, something that is even more valuable than money.

As college students (and admittedly as fellows) we have limited monetary resources. We cannot be expected to open our wallets to make large contributions to each cause on campus, no matter how much we wish we could do so. It is possible however, to give a small amount of money as a symbol of our support. When God asks the Israelites to contribute a half-shekel each, it is more of a symbolic contribution to the Tabernacle than anything else.

When God asks the Israelites to contribute other items however, he is addressing a more profound value, and that is the idea that we each have something unique to give to causes we care about. Whether you are giving your time on an Alternative Spring Break trip to El Salvador, Argentina, or even volunteering while you are at home, you have chosen to give up your free time to do so. You have made a conscious decision to give the most valuable things you have, and those are your time and your passion. You are truly showing your dedication to the community and to the value of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world.

I will leave you with one other question relating to this week's Parasha. The Tabernacle was meant to be a visual reminder of God's presence during the time of the Israelites. Today, do we need this type of reminder, and if so where do we find it? Many times when we are doing service and advocacy work, it seems as if we are not making any progress and there is no end in sight. Taking a moment to think about how what we are doing affects others can remind us of why we are so committed. For example, at the end of a long day working at an after school program, take the time to look at the joy in the

eyes of the child you are working with. That little bit of joy is a reminder that God is right here with us, working alongside us.