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True Greatness

By: Rabbi Avraham Abrams (Originally Published 2005)

If you have ever visited New York's famous Metropolitan Museum of Art, you probably noticed the plaques on the walls proclaiming that "The Metropolitan Museum of Art appreciates the most generous gift from so and so." I probably can't pronounce, let alone spell, the numerous adjectives that are used to describe the magnanimity of the many donors.

Similarly, most of the world's more impressive architectural structures bear the name of the designer, as well as the names of the donors who helped pay for the buildings. Regrettably, in the larger secular culture, prominent public recognition is often a necessary ingredient in receiving donations. However, this is far from the ideal in Jewish tradition.

Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna (1890- 1969), famed head of the Chevron Yeshiva in Jerusalem, noted an interesting point in this week's Parsha. The construction of the Mishkan was permeated with Ahavas Hashem, love of G-d. The Jewish People demonstrated this love by giving freely and generously to the Mishkan's construction. Equally amazing was the wisdom with which the Mishkan was built.

However, the Torah concludes its description of the completion of the Mishkan in this week's Parsha with the words, "And behold they did it [the Mishkan] as Hashem commanded" (39:42).

What stands out is that there is no mention of the great donations or the exceptional minds that made the Mishkan the central and sacred place that it was. The reason for this, observes Reb Yechezkel, is because public recognition for these acts was not the greatest badge of honor for those who contributed toward the building. Rather, the greatest accolade that could be bestowed upon those who worked on the Mishkan was the same "recognition" all of us should strive for – "They did as Hashem commanded."

Alumni Focus Rabbi Avraham Abrams

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