

DIVINE ACCOUNTING

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

"Speak to the children of Israel that they should take for Me an offering, from every man whose heart will motivate him you shall take My offering." (Shemos/Exodus 25:2) G-d instructs Moshe to appeal to the Jewish people for donations of all of the necessary materials for the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Generally, one's donation to a particular cause is understood as "giving". Why does G-d charge the nation that people should "TAKE for Me an offering"?

The Talmud (Brachos 35a) teaches if one benefits from pleasures in this world without first reciting the appropriate blessing, it is as if he benefited from that which belongs to G-d. Only after reciting the blessing is it considered his to enjoy. Chasam Sofer (1) explains that G-d creates and possesses everything; mankind is incapable of giving Him something He does not already have. Further, everything was put in this world for a purpose. When someone recites a blessing before he eats, he is using food as an opportunity to connect with G-d by appreciating one of the many, constant acts of Divine kindness. Because of this appreciation, G-d allows the beneficiary to truly take possession of the food as a gift. But when one eats without reciting the blessing, it is akin to stealing something that he does not own.

The same understanding applies to money and other material belongings. When one uses the resources with which G-d entrusted him with to fulfill mitzvos (Divine commands), G-d gives them those belongings as a gift. After he passes away, he cannot take with him to the next world the wealth he amassed during his lifetime, but he does take the merit for the charity, the free loans, the Torah study and other mitzvos he accomplished and facilitated with that wealth. Thus, the Jews were told to "take" an offering for G-d rather than to give one. G-d did not need to solicit donations to possess the materials necessary for the Mishkan's construction; it was impossible to actually give G-d anything since he ultimately owns everything. But by giving to the Mishkan, the Jews were, in fact, acquiring the belongings for themselves.

Paradoxically, this Divine accounting dictates that selfish people who constantly take from others do not really, in the end, own anything at all; it is only those who selflessly give and give who truly possess wealth.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg; 1762-1839; acknowledged leader of Hungarian Jewry of the time

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