

GIVE AND TAKE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Terumah begins with the command to begin gathering funds and resources for the construction of a Mishkan (Tabernacle), in which offerings and sacrifices can be brought, and from which Hashem's presence would emanate. "Speak to the Children of Israel; let them take for My sake a portion... (25:2)" Commentators (see Alshich) note the strange use of the word "take"; one would have expected they would be giving a portion, not taking one! The obvious implication is that they should "take" some of their possessions and "give" them to the collection for the Mishkan, as Rashi indeed explains. All the same, we would have expected the Torah to stress the giving aspect, not the taking, which, while axiomatic, is secondary.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 33:7) comments on the verse, "Let them take a portion for My sake - Regarding this verse it is written (Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:4), 'Torah tziva lanu Moshe - Moshe commanded us to keep the Torah.'" What connection is there between donating to the construction of the Mishkan, and the famous pasuk "Torah tziva lanu"?

Donating to the Mishkan, and in a more general sense giving charity, is perhaps more so than other mitzvos a test of our faith in Hashem, and our belief that whatever we have is ultimately His. The Gemara says that tithing our earnings is actually the key to wealth (Shabbos 119a). Our Sages compare giving charity from our earnings to salting meat - it preserves them! While it is easy to pay lip service to this notion, the fact is it is still counter-intuitive. We've worked hard to earn a living; perhaps we've haggled over our salaries, and we've invested time and effort into budgeting our resources in order to stretch them as far as possible. Now we're told to take a portion of what we've earned and give it away - just like that. (Nowadays, getting a tax-deduction for what we're giving takes away some of the sting; consider for a moment giving everything you give and getting no deduction.) We're not talking about giving a couple dollars to a kid on the block for his "mitzvathon" - that we can do without even thinking. We're talking about taking a hundred, or five-hundred, or a thousand, or more (fill in the appropriate amount based on your income bracket), to the point where it really feels as if by giving you are in some way decreasing your own wealth.

That's where faith comes into the picture. One who really believes that his monetary and material success is a gift from Hashem gives happily, even when it feels as if he'll have less as a result. He treats his money and possessions as if they were on loan from the Almighty - take what you need, but be sure to take care of others as well. By contrast, the person who feels that he's responsible for his own success - that it's his skill, prowess, or even his good fortune that has brought him to where

he is - for such a person giving (substantially) from what he's earned is a difficult task. He may still give, but it's hard not to feel just a tinge of a grudge...

The Midrash says that all the success we enjoy in this world is only in the merit of our emunah (faith) in Hashem. Why? Generally we know that we do not expect repayment for mitzvah performance in the material world (Olam Ha-zeh) - there will be ample reward in the World to Come (Olam Ha-ba; see Eiruvim 22a). Commentators ask: How is it just that Hashem commands us to perform mitzvos in this world, yet He withholds our reward for Olam Ha-ba? There is a prohibition to withhold the wages of one's worker; "On that very day you shall pay him! (Devarim 24:15)" Shouldn't Hashem - so to speak - be held to a similar standard?

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 110b) explains that the prohibition against withholding wages only applies if one hires his own workers. If one hires staff through an agent or manager, neither the business-owner nor his agent transgress any prohibition if wages are paid late. Since Hashem gave us the Torah and its mitzvos through Moshe, His "agent," He can theoretically delay our "payment" until a later date (Olam Ha-Ba), which He does (for our own benefit!).

The Gemara (Makkos 24a) comments that the Torah contains 613 commandments. From where do we derive this count? Torah tziva lanu Moshe - Moshe Rabbeinu commanded us with Torah. The numerical value (gematria) of the word Torah is 611; the number of the mitzvos given to us through Moshe. Add to them the two mitzvos we heard directly from Hashem - "I am Hashem, your G-d," and "You shall not have any pagan gods" - and you get 613.

If so, while for the 611 mitzvos taught to us by Moshe, Hashem has the right to delay our reward, with regard to the two mitzvos we heard from Hashem directly - the mitzvos which form the basis of our faith and emunah - we must be "paid" on the spot! This is why, explain mefarshim (see Chanukas Ha-Torah, Yisro), "All the success and prosperity we enjoy in this world is in the merit of emunah!"

If, by donating our property to the Mishkan, we demonstrate and confirm our faith and belief that everything we have is from Hashem and due to Hashem, then it follows that we must in fact receive ample reward (in this world!) for whatever we give - for there is no withholding payment for the mitzvah of emunah! That's why the Torah refers to the donation as "taking" and not giving - for the more we give, the more we get back in return! Therefore, explains the Noam Megadim, the Midrash connects the verse "Let them take for Me a donation" to the verse "Torah tziva lanu" - because it is from that pasuk that the Gemara derives that the mitzvos of emunah (faith) were the only mitzvos we received directly from Hashem, thereby necessitating immediate reward and payment. May we have the good judgement and faith to give generously and whole-heartedly when we are asked - and may Hashem indeed reward us amply for our tzedakah!

Have a good Shabbos.

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