

LOOKING A GIFT HOUSE IN THE MOUTH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion." (Shemos 25:1-2)

The concept of taking a portion of one's property and giving it away is not a new concept in the Torah. The first obvious place that the concept of tithing appears is here:

But Malchi-tzedek, king of Shalem, brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of G-d, the Most High. He blessed him saying, "Blessed is Avram of G-d, the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be G-d, the Most High, Who has delivered your foes into your hand;" and he [Avraham] gave him [Malchi-Tzedek] a tenth of everything. (Bereishis 14:20)

In other words, since Malchi-Tzedek, a.k.a. Shem, the son of Noach, was a priest, Avraham automatically removed ten percent from the booty that was collected through his military victory and gave it to him. Unlike other priests of the time, Malchi-Tzedek served G-d and not angels, therefore Avraham felt obliged to support him.

The next time the concept of "ma'aser" shows up, it is here:

Then Ya'akov took a vow saying, "If G-d will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going; will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I return in peace to my father's house, and G-d will be a God to me - then this stone which I will have set up as a pillar shall become a house of G-d, and whatever You will give me, and I will repeatedly tithe to You." (Bereishis 28:20-22)

Understandably, Ya'akov had been concerned. After taking the blessings right out from under Eisav's nose and being forced into exile to avoid Eisav's revenge, the worst was yet to come. While living in Eretz Yisroel, he could count on a special Divine Providence to protect him, but after being forced into "Chutz L'Aretz," he required extra merit to warrant similar success and Divine protection against the "elements." The promise of tithes was his way of saying, "Help me succeed and survive if only to give me the chance to give back to Heaven some of what Heaven has given to me."

A less obvious, but earlier example of tithing was by G-d Himself, at the very creation of man, as the Talmud reveals:

For three reasons women may die at childbirth: If they were not careful in the laws of family purity, or [the taking of] Challah, or the lighting of [Shabbos] candles . . . Because of family purity, it is

understandable, but why because of Challah or candle lighting? It was elucidated by a certain Gallilean before Rav Chisda: The Holy One, Blessed is He, said . . . "I have called you the 'First' and have commanded you regarding it." (Shabbos 31b)

BEHOLD I WILL TAKE YOUR SOULS: . . . Women are commanded in these things because, as it says in Bereishis Rabbah, she [Chavah] destroyed the "Challah" of the world, since Adam HaRishon, who was taken as a portion of Challah, sinned through her . . . (Rashi)

In other words, when G-d made Adam HaRishon, He "kneaded" him from the ground like a woman kneads dough, as it says:

G-d formed man from the dust of the ground . . . (Bereishis 2:7)

Taking off a portion of the dough as "Challah," as a Jewish woman is supposed to do, is symbolic of when Adam was taken as a portion from the ground, and therefore a rectification of the sin as well. Doing this mitzvah Erev Shabbos, which is the ideal time to fulfill this mitzvah, is because that was when Adam was created and sinned. Giving the Challah to the kohen (today we burn it since kohanim cannot properly purify themselves to eat it) is to remind us that our path to complete rectification is that of striving for a holy lifestyle once again.

SHABBOS DAY:

. . . Let them take for Me a portion." (Shemos 25:1-2)

Having said this, then the wording of the posuk makes even better sense. As Rashi points out, the words "for Me" seem superfluous, at least at first glance. Therefore, Rashi explains that G-d was telling the Jewish People to give their "gifts" for the sake of G-d, for as the Sifsei Chachamim points out, "The entire world belongs to G-d!"

In other words, whatever we give to G-d, we are merely returning to Him what was His to begin with. Therefore, how can we even apply the term "gift" to anything we give to G-d, or others on His behalf? We can't.

However, what we can give is our willingness and desire to give to G-d AS IF it were our property to begin with. Thus, in this second posuk of this week's parshah, G-d is telling us not to get confused, but to realize instead the true "gift" we CAN give, and that is our DESIRE to give to G-d.

However, if the root of the idea is that Adam himself was a form of terumah upon his creation, and that by sinning, we took that which belongs to G-d for ourselves, then any giving to G-d is a part of the tikun for this. In other words, through our gifts we are in fact giving a part of Adam HaRishon back to G-d, and in doing so, undoing the effects of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Thus, the "gifts" given for the construction of the Mishkan really represented the gift of ourselves

that we were supposed to have given to G-d. Thus, the rabbis teach that when the Torah says, Make a Mikdash for Me and I will dwell amongst them. (Shemos 25:8)

it refers, ideally, not to the Mishkan itself, but to "them," that is, the Jewish people themselves (Nefesh HaChaim). It does not say, "dwell within it," but "amongst them."

In other words, the physical structure of the Mishkan was just a projection of the actual Mishkan that was supposed to have existed. Had the Jewish people not sinned with the golden calf, according to the Arizal, (which was an exact repetition of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), then WE would have been the Mishkan, and the only gift of construction material would have been our hearts and loyalty.

In other words, as the rabbis teach, the physical Mishkan was the "medicine" for the "illness" that resulted from the sin of the golden calf (Megillah 10b). However, the human Mishkan had always been G-d's intention from the start, and it would have been Adam HaRishon had he not sinned; he himself was the "gift-offering" for its construction.

After he did sin, the Jewish people were supposed to have made right what he did wrong, and thus the Talmud says:

Rebi Shimon bar Yochai said: The grave of a non-Jew does not defile within a tent, as it says, "Now, you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are Adam . . ." (Yechezkel 34:31); you are called "Adam," but not the gentile nations. (Yevamos 61a)

That is, the Jewish people, who have been meant to be a light unto the nations from their inception, were charged with the responsibility of filling the very large shoes of Adam HaRishon. Unfortunately, at the time, they seemed to have been a little TOO big. Thus, instead of giving ourselves back to G-d to build the human Mishkan, we downgraded our gifts to physical materials brought to build a non-human Mishkan.

SEUDOS SHILSHIS:

One thing I asked of G-d, that I shall seek - that I dwell in the House of G-d all the days of my life.
(Tehillim 27:4)

From the first day of Elul, we begin to say Tehillah 27 twice a day. It is "Elul-Zman," the time we are told by tradition that G-d comes out to meet us half way, so to speak. This beautiful posuk expresses our desire to climb our half of the journey towards oneness with G-d.

At first reading, it seems that Dovid HaMelech simply longed to be in the holy environment of the Temple, built later in his son, Shlomo's day. There, any Jew can find inspiration to constantly grow closer to G-d, unimpeded, being enveloped in unimaginable kedushah.

No doubt this is true. However, the name "Adam" is spelled: aleph-dalet-mem. The aleph stands for

"Adam," the dalet stands for "Dovid," and the mem stands for "Moshiach." All three were embodied in the first man.

Furthermore, the Midrash tells us, that Adam's 70 years of life came off of Adam HaRishon's planned 1,000 years of life (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:24). Thus, by definition, Dovid HaMelech's life was the conclusion of Adam HaRishon's life.

Therefore, what Dovid HaMelech yearned for was what his forebear failed to become: the House of G-d, that is, the dwelling place of G-d. He longed to become the original terumah that Adam began as, but stopped being because of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Was he successful? He must have been to some great degree, for aside from being the ancestor of Moshiach, the Talmud writes:

G-d said, "Far better is a day in your courts than a thousand" (Tehillim 84:11); that is, "I prefer one day of your Torah-study than 1,000 Burnt-Offerings which Shlomo, your son, will sacrifice before Me upon the altar." (Shabbos 30a)

Hmm. That's quite a comparison, and it teaches us a lot about what we are supposed to be striving to achieve in daily life, regardless of our vocations. Whether in the business world, or in the Bais Midrash, the goal is to become a virtual "House of G-d," and we do that by giving terumos and by being one. As we shall see soon, Torah-study plays a major role in our success at doing this.

For, the implication of the statement is even more profound than the numerical comparison, and that Dovid HaMelech's Torah-study was more effective as a relationship builder to G-d than 1,000 Burnt Offerings in the actual, physical Temple. He was the sacrifice brought before G-d on the altar of his heart, and that gave off a more acceptable "fragrance" than 1,000 holy Burnt Offerings.

Which brings us back to our parshah, Boruch Hashem, and the very concept of "terumah" itself.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Take for Me a portion (terumah). (Shemos 25:1-2)

TAKE FOR ME A TERUMAH (TAV-RAISH-VAV-MEM-HEH): The letters are "mem" and "Torah," which was given in 40 (mem) days to those who eat terumah . . . And this is what it means when it says, "Take for Me, that is, for My Name, because all those who learn Torah are as if they took Me," for The Holy One, Blessed is He, is only found now in this world within four amos of halachah. (Ba'al HaTurim)

In other words, the ultimate terumah is Torah that was given in 40 days, and learning Torah lishmah - for its own sake - is the greatest gift we can give to G-d. When we learn Torah, and envelope ourselves in a halachic environment, we become the human mishkans we are destined to become.

Mesiros nefesh (self-sacrifice) for Torah learning, whether we are sacrificing ourselves time-wise to

learn, or financially to help others to learn, is our personal statement to G-d about how we feel about what He feels the strongest about. When we sacrifice ourselves on the altar of Torah - on WHATEVER level of learning capability - as Dovid HaMelech did, then we become the "House of G-d" in which he yearned to dwell all his days.

The connection between terumah, Torah, and the House of G-d is made even clearer by the next idea of the Ba'al HaTurim:

TAKE FOR ME A TERUMAH: Make for me a place that is 1/50th of the Temple Mount like terumah which is 1/50th. The Temple Mount was 500 amos by 500 amos, and the Courtyard was 100 amos by 50 amos, which is 1/50th of 500 by 500. (Ba'al HaTurim)

To this, we can add the words of the Nefesh HaChaim:

There is also another notion that should make the heart of every man belonging to the holy nation tremble: included in him are all of the countless Forces and Worlds, as we will explain later . . . These Powers and Worlds comprise the Heavenly Temple. The heart of man, found in the "middle" of the body and which incorporates everything, corresponds to the Holy of Holies, which is considered to be in the center of the world, and the Evven Shesia. It includes all the sources and roots of holiness, just like the Holy of Holies . . . In the Zohar it says: Come and see how The Holy One, Blessed is He, when He made man, perfected him according to the supernal plan, and imbued him with power and strength in the center of his body, because that is where his heart is situated. The Holy One, Blessed is He, set up the world in a similar fashion, as a single body. For, just as the heart is in the middle of the body and controls everything, and everything is dependent upon it . . . so too did the Courtyard envelope the Holy of Holies where the Divine Presence dwelled, as well as the ark cover (Kappores), the cherubim, and the ark. Here is considered the "heart" of the entire land and world, and from here the entire world is nourished (Zohar, Shlach 161:1) . . . If so, then, when a person pursues impure thoughts of his heart, (we should be protected from such things), it is comparable to bringing a woman of hire, the symbol of Divine jealousy, into the awesome Holy of Holies in the Heavenly Temple; he strengthens the forces of impurity and the "Other Side" (i.e., Sitra Achra) there, far more than Titus did when he actually committed a profane act with such a woman into the Holy of Holies in the Temple below. Every sin a Jew considers in his heart is a "strange fire," whether it is a feeling of anger or an evil longing. It is to this that the verse literally refers, "Our holy house and our glory which . . . was burned in fire . . ." (Yeshayahu 64:10). (Nefesh HaChaim, 1:4)

This is a very deep idea. Man's physical and spiritual structure is a microcosm of the entire existence, echoing it precisely. For every part of a human being, there is a spiritual counterpart that is directly affected by all that we do, say, and think. And, when we make the supreme do all of that in a Torah context and direction, we become the perfect "gift" to G-d, and become a "house" within which He can dwell.

Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston

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