

PUT THE TORAH IN YOUR TERUMAH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, "Tell the Children of Israel that anyone who desires to bring to Me an elevated-offering should do so." (Shemos 23:12)

The Ba'al Haturim points out an interesting gematria that I certainly would never have thought of myself. He explains that the word terumah — elevated offering — is comprised of the word Torah, and the letter Mem, representing the 40 days that Moshe Rabbeinu was on Har Sinai receiving Torah. Hence, the ultimate elevated offering: The Learning and performance of Torah. I'd like to adapt this explanation in a way to explain, in current terms, an ancient idea: yiddishe nachas.

A friend of mine became religious around the age of 22, coming from a very secular family. He could have been a financial success, but the truth beckoned him, and as the rest of his family went off to become financial successes in their own right, he went off to learn Torah instead.

Family get-togethers over the years were always awkward. Nobody appreciated what he had done, or why, or the sacrifice he had made for something the rest of his family had turned their back on. Rather, they saw that he remained poor by secular standards, and as far as they were concerned, financially dependent on others like most Orthodox Jews.

There he was, in a totally secular setting, amongst doctors, lawyers, and reputable business people. And, just as they dressed their part, he dressed his part, and always stood out, no matter how polite everyone remained with each other.

It was not hard to see who made his parents the proudest. Though he knew his parents loved him, he also could see how his siblings represented the kind of success every secular parent dreams of for his or her children. Though he may have been somewhat of a success in his world, it was a world that the rest of the family cared little about, and for which they had little respect. He was not a great source of pride for any of them.

Years passed, and they had many get-togethers. However, a shift began to occur over time that, at first, was imperceptible, but which over time became more pronounced. It was the kind of thing that happens to many Jewish parents as they get older, as the secular world that they had once embraced becomes increasingly less important.

At the same time, the secular side of the family became increasingly more secular, until finally intermarriages began to occur. And, even though his parents were quick to try and accept every

new member of the family with open arms, and were quite secular themselves, still, something did not sit right with them knowing that Judaism was dying in their family, and that took on added meaning now as they were confronting the reality of death.

In the meantime, though my friend did not solve his financial situation, he was surviving. He was married, and had a family of his own. He had children, all of whom were either in cheder or seminary. As far as his parents could see, he was the only one who would maintain a link between his family and the rest of the Jewish people, and his parents began to appreciate this more and more.

In fact, they became less critical of my friend, and increasingly more critical of his siblings, whose jet-setting lives excluded all things Jewish, even God. Even family get-togethers seemed less sincere, as their family values became increasingly more western, leaving their parents behind somewhat.

In the twilight of the parents' lives, it was my friend that they gravitated towards. They remained proud of the accomplishments of their other children, but not like in the past. No matter how secular people are in the earlier years, as the body begins to slow down, and even come to a halt with old age, family values are what come to the foreground, and are the most cherished.

They probably don't know how it happened, but his siblings are resentful, somewhat. Their brother, who has accomplished so little by their standards, became so important to their parents that they speak of him much of the time, and what he is doing and accomplishing in his world. It's as if one day they related to his world and stopped relating to theirs. They did not realize that nachas is not enough for a parent; it has to be yiddishe nachas.

This is because, fight it as people might, the soul of a Jew is made from the same light that emanates through the letters of the Torah. In our early years, we can add layers of materialism over that light until it is almost invisible, but as we get older, and those layers automatically begin to fade away, the light returns once again, and we connect to our inner being, which is really quite Jewish. As a result, eventually, the only things that can please us have to be Jewish at the core.

It is the same as the word terumah. God, in this week's parshah, wasn't just asking for nachas, He was asking for yiddishe nachas — an elevated offering that had at its core Torah. There is charity, and then there is tzeddakah, and as similar as the two seem, they are miles apart. For, charity is simply giving because it's what you feel like doing, but tzeddakah is what you give because it is the Torah's idea of righteousness, of being Godly. Charity gives God nachas, but tzeddakah gives God yiddishe nachas.

This idea has many applications, and in ways that we might not have previously considered.

Take the incident of the Spies, for example. Even though the Torah makes them out to be bad guys from the beginning, people bent on going against the will of God, in truth, we would be missing the point about them, and us, if we wrote them off this way. It was far more complicated than that. In

fact, when they came back with their evil report about Eretz Yisroel, they had thought they were doing a mitzvah. How else could they have rationalized rejecting the gift of Eretz Yisroel right before God, after watching in the previous parshah, how quickly God is to punish evildoers? They had considered themselves heroes, and not enemies of the people, which is why they were so shocked when God dealt with them that way.

What mitzvah?

The mitzvah to learn Torah, of course. If they went to war against the Canaanites, which could take seven years, when would they have time to learn? They would go from being warriors of Torah to warriors for land, totally disrupting their learning schedules for years. Certainly God would hear their plea, which would only reveal how much they loved the very Torah that God himself cherished so much.

However, God's response back to them, figuratively-speaking, was, "I don't know whose Torah you were learning up until now, but it wasn't Mine! It may have looked like Mine, and sounded like Mine, but My Torah," God in effect was saying, "says that I can't become the kind of God for you that I took you out of Egypt to become, unless you live in Eretz Yisroel; and you reject it?"

We all know that there are two levels to Torah, the actual physical representation of Torah, and the soul of Torah. Anyone who wants to learn Torah and perform mitzvos can do so, even look religious and play the part perfectly, and yet, still miss the point of Torah. Unfortunately, people do it all the time, many of whom think they're doing just fine from God's perspective.

It is the reason for spiritual inconsistency. Religious people have active yetzer haras just like secular people, but they can't simply give in to it. They do not like to sin outright, which presents two possible avenues: Either to deny the validity of Torah, and wipe away the source of sin, or to turn the sin into a mitzvah somehow. And, as history has shown, when it comes to the latter approach, there have been some creative geniuses, so-to-speak.

It is the soul of Torah that undoes all of that. As the Talmud states, the ways of Torah are pleasantness, and the Torah scholars bring peace to the world. Certainly, in the name of peace, there are times when one must raise a sword and fight the enemy, either physically or spiritually, but all too often, the sword is brandished at times the soul of Torah calls for a far more peaceful, far more Godly approach.

Someone who is connected not just to the physical Torah, but also to the spirit of Torah, feels in his or her being what the Torah wants, and how to behave, even when it may not be so obvious at first what to do. For, to connect to Torah on this level is to become one with it, and when that happens, he brings yiddishe nachas to his Creator in all that he does. Everything he does becomes a true elevated-offering to God.

For, the ultimate terumah is not the money that we give, but the "us" that we give through the

money, or the time, or the energy. How and why we do something is more important than what we give, because it is our heart that we are giving to God, and He only wants sincere ones. That is the meaning of the "Torah" inside "terumah," like the heart inside our giving. It doesn't refer to the outer Torah; that's the laws of terumah themselves. It refers to the inner Torah, the one that aligns us with God and what He truly wants.

Adar has arrived. We are told by the rabbis that it is the time to increase joy, but not how to do it. Does it mean to drink more alcohol, to indulge in more physical pleasures, or to take long walks? What did the rabbis have in mind when they encouraged us to do more of what we like to do best?

The clue is in the word simchah, which is spelled Shin-Mem-Ches-Heh. Oneg usually refers to physical pleasures, as in, Oneg Shabbos. However, simchah is usually pleasure that is derived from a spiritual experience, such as simchas mitzvah — joy from performing a mitzvah, an intellectual experience. Hence, in the center of the word are the letters Mem-Ches, which spell moach, which means brain. Simchah is a function of the brain.

So, when the rabbis say that, in Adar, we should increase our simchah, they are telling us that this is a good time of year to increase our awareness of that knowledge which results in simchah. What kind of knowledge is that? It is the knowledge of to what extent God is involved in our lives, has control of everything, and wants what is best for us. It is the awareness of the fact that, in spite of the appearance of chaos in Creation, it all answers to the One Who created it, and Who controls it.

This knowledge is obviously the basis of bitachon — trust in God. Trust in God only works if God has complete control of everything, which obviously He does. But, it is not just enough to know this is true, it has to be strong in one's heart as well. A person has to have a knowing heart, one that feels what the brain knows.

Kabbalah explains that there are 32 Paths of Wisdom, which emanate out from the sefirah of Chochmah — Wisdom — which is the level of the brain, so-to-speak. They descend to Binah, which is the level of the heart. Hence, the gematria of heart, or leiv in Hebrew, is 32. When the knowledge of the brain reaches the heart, the heart becomes a knowing heart.

This also corresponds to the Torah within terumah, like the heart within the body. Just as the word Torah is within the word terumah, so too must the knowledge of God be within a person's heart if it is to be real to him, and show up in what he thinks, says, and does. Only then can a person feel the reality of Torah, and experience the ongoing joy — the yiddishe nachas — that goes along with it.

Today, as I was on my way home from Jerusalem, my bus turned down Rechov Malchei Yisroel, as normal. However, right after the turn, there was an ambulance stopped, partially blocking our side of the road. Lots of people were standing around, which meant that whatever happened had just recently occurred, and was serious enough that people stopped to watch.

With a bus to catch and two more stops to make, I was immediately uptight. "Why couldn't the

ambulance have stopped more on the other side of the road, and at least closed his doors so our traffic could keep flowing?" popped into my head. Someone did close his doors, and our bus began to inch its way past the scene, which only became visible to me as we became parallel with the ambulance.

I could not see what happened, just the paramedics trying to get a board underneath someone. However, as we inched a little further, I noticed a little pool of fresh blood on the road close to where everything happened, and it woke me up to reality. "Someone was seriously hurt, probably hit by a car while crossing the road, and I was worried about making my bus and finishing my errands in time? How selfish!" I finally thought to myself, and immediately began saying some Tehillim.

Nothing like a little burst of life-and-death reality to put the Torah back into your terumah, so-to-speak. The more we do it through our own efforts to be real with life, the less God has to do it for us through the events of our lives and of history. That's important to know in general, but specifically at this time as well, as the War of Gog and Magog looms, which will only be meant to wake up a world that lives without the reality of God, without the Torah within terumah. How big a wake-up call it has to be will depend upon us, and how awake we already are when it happens.

Text

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