

DOING FOR ONESELF

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape# 87, Microphone on Shabbos. Good Shabbos!

"And You Shall Take for Me Teruma" -- Doing For Oneself

This week's parsha contains the section in the Torah that deals with the building of the Mishkan. The Torah tells us that the Jewish people were commanded to bring a donation to Moshe Rabbeinu for the purpose of erecting a Mishkan (Tabernacle).

The pasuk [verse] uses the expression, "...and take for Me (v'yikchu Li) a donation..." [Shemos 25:2]. The obvious question is that this is a peculiar choice of words. The more appropriate expression would have been "...and give to Me (v'yitnu Li) a donation..."

On a simple level, we can say that since G-d really owns everything ("...to Hashem is the Earth and all that it contains..." [Tehillim 24:1]), it is impossible to speak of giving Him anything. Giving usually implies I have ownership and I transfer the ownership to someone else. Therefore, when we talk about the Master of the World, we don't use the expression "giving." Instead, we use the expression "taking." That is to say, G-d already owns everything, we merely 'allow' Him to take that which is already His.

In Parshas Vayera, Rav Shlomo Breuer, zt"l has a beautiful thought on this concept of "taking for Me Teruma." Whenever we 'give,' whether we do chessed with our bodies or we do chessed with our money, every giving is actually a 'taking.' Whenever a person does a chessed, he is really doing more for himself than for the person to whom he is giving.

The Medrash says in Parshas Vayikra, "More than what a Ba'al HaBayis does for a poor person, the poor person does for the Ba'al HaBayis." If one gives a person a donation, the money is a very temporary thing. Perhaps it pays for the next meal; perhaps it pays for the rent. In actuality, it is very, very finite. On the other hand, the person who 'gives,' in addition to acquiring Olam HaBaw (the World to Come), accumulates something else as well... He acquires that which it does to his personality, that which it does to his soul and to his self-esteem. By helping another person, one is

taking far more than he is giving.

Rav Breuer points out the first time that we find an act of chessed in the Torah: by Avraham Avinu and the Angels. The invitation extended by our Patriarch Avraham to the Angels, offering them a place to eat and a place to sleep, is the first overt mention of an act of kindness in the Torah.

When we look at that parsha we see an interesting thing. How many times does the Torah use the expression "...let water be taken (yuKach nah me'at mayim)..." [Bereishis 18:4]; "...I will take bread (va-eKcha pas lechem)..." [18:5]? What kind of expression is that? Avraham should have said "I will give water; I will give bread."

The answer is that Avraham Avinu is instructing his children and telling them, "My children, you should know for all future generations, that when you help someone else, you are not giving; you are taking!"

When a person helps someone, he/she does more for himself/herself than he/she does for the other person. This is what the Torah is teaching us with the expression "V'Yikchu Li Teruma." Whether a person gives to an individual or to an institution, he/she is really receiving more than he/she is giving.

Getting Our Priorities Straight: Table/Menorah Flour/Torah

When the Torah explains how the vessels of the Mishkan were set out, the pasuk tells us: "You will then place the cover on the Ark of Testimony in the Holy of Holies. And place the Table outside the curtain and the Menorah should be placed opposite the Table, toward the southern wall; and the Table should be toward the northern wall." [26:34-35]

Anyone who carefully looks at the pasuk, sees a redundancy. If the Torah first tells us to put the Table in front of the curtain and then immediately tells us to put the Menorah opposite it on the southern side, any person with power of deduction knows that as a result, the Table is on the northern side. Why does the Torah have to repeat and reiterate the fact that the Table is on the northern side?

I once heard a beautiful interpretation of this from Rav Kulefsky, shlit"a. The sefer "Sifsei Kohen" asks the following question: We know that symbolically the Table represents Parnasa -- the ability for the Jewish people to sustain themselves physically and materially. The Menorah symbolically represents Torah, the light of the Menorah symbolizes the Light of Torah. Why is it then, asks the Sifsei Kohen, that the Table was placed first, before the Menorah? After all, the Menorah is more significant than the Table?

Rav Kulefsky answers, "If there is no flour there is no Torah" [Mishneh Avot 3:17]. If there is no livelihood, there can be no Torah; therefore, first we put out the Table, representing parnasa; then

we put out the Menorah, representing Torah.

Rav Kulefsky asks further, that the same Mishneh goes on to say, "If there is no Torah, there is no flour!" So what did the Sifsei Kohen accomplish by quoting the Mishneh? The question remains, why give the Table priority over the Menorah?

Rav Kulefsky quotes a very important comment from the Gaon of Vilna (in his commentary to Mishlei). The Mishneh also says "If there is no wisdom (chochma) there is no Fear of G-d (Yir-ah)." Then the Mishneh says, "If there is no Fear of G-d, there is no wisdom." The Gaon asks, what does this mean? Which way is it?

The Gaon answers that when we speak in terms of chronological priorities then wisdom has to proceed Fear of G-d, because "the ignoramus cannot be pious" [Avot 2:5]. Simply, one who does not know anything cannot be observant. However in terms of goals ('tachlis'); in terms of what it is all about, then priority is given to Fear of G-d. In other words, if wisdom is not going to lead to observance, (the fellow who writes 'chidushei Torah' on Shabbos while smoking a cigarette), the wisdom is worthless. If the person can learn a blatt Gemara, but he is not an honest person, his learning is not worth much.

The same is true here as well. In terms of chronological priorities, unless one establishes a viable means of supporting himself -- one way or another -- if there is no flour, there is no Torah. If one has to go around begging, he is not going to be able to sit and learn.

But in terms of what it's all about, in terms of tachlis, if it doesn't lead to Torah, if one is just accumulating money for the sake of making money, then the money is worthless. If one does not use his 'kemach' for the right reasons, it is of no value.

This is what the Torah is telling us: First we place the Table, because "if there is no flour, there is no Torah." Then we put the Menorah opposite the Table -- because we need the Table to be there for the Menorah / Torah to exist.

Then the pasuk reiterates that the Table should be on the northern side. Now that we have reached the point where we have established the Menorah / Torah, we must realize that the Table's only purpose is to be opposite the Menorah. At this point, we are to realize that the Table's reason for being is only to support the Menorah. Merely having a Table, in and of itself, serves no purpose. We need to have our priorities straight: Without Torah, the 'flour' serves no purpose!

Menschlichkeit and our Sages: A Comment on last week's Shiur

Several people requested a clarification on the last shiur, asking how it was possible to even imply that Rebbe Yehoshua and the other great Sages might have lacked basic proper conduct in their debate with Rabbi Eliezer, or even more that one could be called "not a mensch."

The Jerusalem Talmud itself says that Rabbi Eliezer only disagreed "because they burned that which he deemed pure in front of him." The Korban Eida explains that Rabbi Eliezer felt that doing so reflected a lack of derech erez, proper conduct - yes, menschlichkeit. He believed that they were not acting for the sake of Heaven, but to deliberately aggravate him, and as a result they were all invalid as judges. Again, it is the Korban Eida itself which says that Rabbi Eliezer believed they were invalid as judges as a result of their lack of derech erez, proper conduct.

Nonetheless, the questioners are correct to point out that we are discussing people who lived on a tremendously high spiritual level, and it would be a great error to think that they could lack 'menschlichkeit' on our level. What we would consider behavior completely for the sake of Heaven, they would consider grossly lacking, and we must learn on our level while remaining cognizant of the difference between their level of 'menschlichkeit,' and our own.

Using the expression "not a mensch" was colorful language, but - obviously - also not accurate. It is an error to say that because a person lacks proper behavior in one area, he is "not a mensch" overall - and it would in any case be inconceivable that a great Sage would indeed be "not a mensch."

And, sof kol sof [in the end], the Halacha is not like Rabbi Eliezer!

Glossary

Beis HaMikdash -- House of Sanctity (Holy Temple)

Mishkan -- Tabernacle

chessed -- kindness

Ba'al HaBayis -- Literally, Master of the House; in this context it means a benefactor.

zt"l -- zecher Tzadik l'Bracha (the memory of the Righteous should be for a Blessing)

shlit"a -- she'yichye l'orech yamim tovim, amen (May he live long and happily, amen)

parnasa -- livelihood

chidushei Torah -- novel insights into Torah

kemach -- flour

mensch -- (Yiddish) person (who behaves in a dignified manner)

menschlichkeit -- good, warm, dignified conduct

Personalities & Sources:

Rav Shlomo Breuer -- (1850-1926); Rabbi in Hungary and Germany; son-in-law of and successor to R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (Frankfort).

Rav Yakov Moshe Kulefsky -- Senior faculty member at Ner Israel Rabbinical College; Baltimore, MD.

Gaon of Vilna -- Rav Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797). Considered the greatest Torah scholar in many centuries.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#87). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Microphone on Shabbos. The other halachic portions for Parshas Terumah from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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