

THE ONLY THING YOU CAN TAKE WITH YOU IS YOUR DINING ROOM TABLE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #362: The Mechitza: How High? Good Shabbos!

The Only Thing You Can Take With You Is Your Dining Room Table

The parsha begins with the first 'building campaign' in the history of the Jewish people. "...and let them take for Me (v'yikchu li) a portion from every man whose heart motivates him..." [Shemos 25:2]. Many of the commentaries are troubled by the verb "v'Yikchu" [let them take]. The more appropriate language would be "v'Yitnu" [let them give] a donation.

A number of the commentaries who discuss this choice of words arrive at the same conclusion, namely that the Jewish viewpoint regarding giving charity is different than the common or secular viewpoint. The common attitude towards making a contribution is "I am 'giving'. It is my hard-earned money. I will GIVE some of my money to charity."

However, when G-d gave the command to build a Mishkan [Tabernacle], and the "building committee" came to collect money, it was made very clear that nobody was really giving anything of their own. This is because a Jew is supposed to believe that everything that he has in this world is from G-d. This concept can be referred to as prudent stewardship. G-d has made us custodians of His money. He has entrusted it to us. When we make a donation, we are not giving. Rather, the charity collector is taking back that which really belongs to G-d.

Technically, when a charity collector comes to collect money, he should not use the expression "Can you please GIVE me a donation". Rather, he should say, "I want to TAKE a donation" (I would not advise this from a practical standpoint). This philosophy should make it easier for us whenever we need to give. First of all, it is not 'ours'. Secondly, there is a famous cliché -- and so true it is -- we can't take it with us. The only thing a person will ever take with him from this world will be the mitzvah that he got when he gave to charity.

There is a very powerful Rabbeinu Bechaye later in the parsha. The pasuk in Yechezkel says, "The Mizbayach [Altar] was of wood, three cubits tall and its length was two cubits including its corners; its surface and its sides were of wood. He said to me, 'This is the Shulchan [Table] that is before Hashem'" [41:22]. The pasuk begins talking about the Mizbayach and ends up speaking about the Shulchan. Our Sages say [Brachos 25a] that this hints at the fact that when the Bais HaMikdash [Temple] was standing, a person achieved atonement via the Mizbayach. Now that the Bais HaMikdash is no longer standing, a person achieves atonement via the Shulchan.

However, the question can be asked: Why does the Shulchan help more than the Aron? When the Bais HaMikdash is no longer standing, the Shulchan that existed in the Bais HaMikdash no longer exists either. Why is the Shulchan better than the Aron, when we have neither of them? The intent is that one's own dining room table provides atonement.

One's dining room table can be one's ticket to the World to Come. The kindness that one performs around his dining room table (by inviting guests and feeding those in need) will be the means by which a person achieves atonement nowadays that we do not have an Mizbayach.

Rabbeinu Bechaye adds that it was the custom of pious people in France to use the wood of their dining room table as building materials for their own coffins. Imagine -- being buried in one's dining room table! Why? The purpose was to teach them that they would not take a dime with them. Nothing will escort us to the next world except the charity that we gave during our life and the kindness that we showed towards others around our table.

This seems to have been an accepted custom in Europe. People wanted to take an item with them which would argue on their behalf as they approached the Heavenly Court. I once heard from Rav Pam, that the honest tailors in Europe used to request that they be buried with the yardstick by which they measured material. The way to 'cheat' in the tailoring business 200 years ago in Europe was for the tailor to take as much material for himself as he could get away with (from the material that their customers would bring to them to make clothing). The honest tailors, who never used the yardstick to cheat customers, asked that the yardstick be included in the coffin with them -- as a critical defense attorney on their behalf, when they faced their final Judgment.

The only thing we can take with us to the next world is our dining room table -- not the physical dining room table, but what we did with it and around it. This is the lesson of 'taking Terumah'.

Nothing really belongs to us. In the final analysis, nothing will really help us other than the charity that we did around our table.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Terumah are provided below:

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