

THE POOR TAKES ONLY WHAT BELONGS TO HIM ALREADY

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 #767, Kohain, Kaddish, and Kadima Good Shabbos!

In the middle of the detailing the Jewish Holidays of the calendar year, the Torah gives us the commandments of Peah and Leket: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am Hashem Your G-d." [Vayikra 23:22]. We are commanded to leave over certain parts of our harvest to the impoverished and the stranger in our midst. A Jew must leave a corner of his field for the poor. Likewise, if he forgets to pick up certain parts of the harvest, these too become "Gifts for the Poor".

We are approaching Shavuot. We know the story of Rus. Rus was penniless. Her mother-in-law Naomi had no money. Rus met Boaz. How did she meet him? She met him in his field when she was collecting "Gifts for the Poor" (Matnos Aniyim) that he and his workers left over in fulfillment of the Biblical commands of Leket, Shikcha, and Peah.

Rashi quotes the Mishna in Peah regarding the words "For the poor and the strangers you shall leave them over": "Leave it for them and they will pick it up themselves; you may not assist any of them in their gathering."

If we were to take a poll whether or not it would be preferable for a field owner to help the poor people collect their gifts from his field or make them do it themselves, I am sure that the overwhelming response would have been that the field owner should be a nice guy and lend a sickle or offer a helping hand to the poor who came to his field to receive the "Matnos Aniyim". However, as strange as it seems, the Torah rules to the contrary. "Tazaov Osam" -- "Leave it for them." Do not be a nice guy. Do not help them! The pasuk concludes with the words "I am the L-rd". Rashi says that the intent is a promise: "If you leave them alone and allow them to pick it up themselves, I am the L-rd who will give you your reward."

This is totally counter-intuitive. What is the interpretation of this Mishna and these words of Rashi? I saw an interesting answer in a Sefer called Otzros haTorah: When the poor person comes to a field to collect the Peah and the owner makes a point of saying "Hello, How are you? Let me help you collect your stuff" or alternatively, when the owner rushes to cut down the stalks for the poor person and hand it to him, the owner is in effect telling the poor person, "Listen here, I am giving you a

present."

The Torah is telling us that Leket, Shikcha, Peah are NOT gifts from the landowner. The Peah BELONGS to the poor person. If the owner participates in the collection, he is acting like the OWNER of those items. When the owner gives a gift, he expects the poor person to be beholden to him and appreciate his generosity. No, the Torah says. Leave it for the poor and the strangers. The Torah's message to the land owner is: "You are not the owner of that portion of the field. The portion of the crop that falls or gets forgotten from the outset belongs to the poor!" The way to convey that is for the land owner to take no part in the distribution of these items. Let the poor collect it themselves -- it is after all their property in the first place!

If a person has that attitude, then he will be deserving of "Ani Hashem ne'eman l'shalem sechar" (I am the L-rd; faithful to pay reward.)

Truth be told, this should be our attitude regarding all Tzedakah [charity]. When the Almighty blesses us and gives us extra funds, we should not think of our charitable donations in terms of "I am giving MY money to you." G-d made me the steward over this money. It is as if I am the trustee of a foundation. When the trustee of a foundation gives out the money, it is not his money. It belongs to the foundation. He is merely a trustee, charged with guaranteeing that the funds are distributed.

When we give Tzedakah, we should have the same attitude. Thankfully, G-d gave me more money than I need -- I am a trustee on this money. I am not giving it to you from my own pocket -- it comes from G-d's Table (M'shulchan Gavoha).

Why Isn't Shavuot Called Simchas Torah?

Parshas Emor contains the Jewish holidays. One of the holidays is the Festival of Shavuot, which is not too far off at this point. Even though the Torah does not mention it explicitly, we all know that Shavuot is the time of our being given the Gift of Torah (z'man Matan Toraseinu) and it is the Yom Tov upon which we celebrate this fact.

The obvious question is the following: If we had to pick a good name for the holiday of Shavuot, it would seem like there is a much better name for the holiday: Simchas Torah! We received the Torah on Shavuot. We celebrate that event -- Simchas Torah! What could be a more logical name for this holiday?

The question then is why is Simchas Torah not on Shavuot? And do not tell me because that we celebrate "Simchas Torah" in the fall because that is when we finish reading the Torah cycle. They could have set up the system such that we read Parshas Bereishis on the first Shabbos after Shavuot and we finish the cycle the following year on the holiday of "Simchas Torah" -- seven weeks after Pessach.

Is it not a redundancy to celebrate both Simchas Torah and Shavuot? Why isn't Shavuot the day of Simchas Torah? What is the explanation for two different holidays commemorating Torah?

I once saw a beautiful observation from Rav Simcha Zissel Brody, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva. There are two types of gifts in the world. There are gifts that have value because of the value of the gift (such as the gift of a diamond, a car, a beautiful painting -- something with intrinsic value) and there are gifts that are valuable by virtue of the fact of who gives it to you.

Lyndon Johnson was a very effective president when it came to passing legislation. He knew how to get bills through Congress! He used to have elaborate bill signings in the White House. In front of him would be a whole bunch of pens and he would sign his name slowly using a different pen for every curve of every letter in the name Lyndon Baines Johnson. Any person who was invited into the ceremony received one of the pens used by the president for signing the legislation into law as a gift. The pen itself might cost only a couple of dollars but it was a very important gift because it came from the President of the United States. Likewise, anyone who flies in Air Force One is given cufflinks with the insignia of the President of the United States. Again, the cufflinks are worth at most \$50. However, the fact that it came from the President makes it an extremely valuable present. These are the two types of presents -- intrinsically valuable and valuable by virtue of the person who gave it.

What happens when we have the confluence of both aspects -- something that is the most valuable gift in the world and something that was given by the Greatest Being in the universe? That is Matan Torah. The gift of Torah is the most valuable gift in the world -- nothing can compare to Torah in value. And who gave it to us? Not the President of the United States but the King of Kings, Master of the Universe!

How do we celebrate this gift? Rav Simcha Zissel says such a celebration requires two separate days -- one day to contemplate the gift and one day to contemplate the Giver. Shavuos is the Yom Tov of the Torah. It is the holiday when we must come to the realization that "If not for the Torah that was given on this day, I would just be another Joe in the market place!" What would our lives look like without the Torah? What would our families be like without the Torah? [We need go no further than our front doors to peek outside and see the problems in society to know the answer to that question.] Imagine a week without a Shabbos. Imagine a year without our cycle of spiritually uplifting holidays! What would our children look like if we did not have the Torah to guide them in their development? Where would we be?

The Torah is so valuable that it requires us to have a day to sit and appreciate "Thank G-d, who separated us from those who err and who gave us the Torah of Truth and implanted in our midst eternal life." This is Shavuos.

But on that same day, we cannot try to fully understand who the Giver is. That requires a second day, which is Simchas Torah. As we all know, the Yom Tov of Succos is the most universal of all Jewish holidays. It is the holiday when we offer sacrifices on behalf of the 70 nations of the world. It is a universal Yom Tov. Shmini Atzeres (and in Chutz L'Aretz the two days of Shmini Atzeres and

Simchas Torah) is a time when G-d says, as it were, "Everyone has left. The party is over. I just want you to stay with me one extra day." There are no special mitzvos -- no lulav, no esrog, no Succah, no 70 nations -- just the Almighty and His Nation getting together for a time of intimate connection. This is the day when we concentrate on the Master of the Universe. This is the day dedicated to the Giver of the gift of Torah.

Shvauos allows us to celebrate the "cheftza" of Torah (the item itself) and Shmini Atzeres / Simchas Torah allows us to contemplate the greatness of the Giver of the Torah.

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Rabbi Yossi states: Whoever honors the Torah his body is honored by creatures and whoever desecrates Torah, his body is desecrated by creatures.

There are various interpretations as to what type of honor or desecration of the Torah is referred to in this Mishna. Rashi says that the desecration of Torah referred to here is leaving a Sefer Torah (or Sefarim) lying on a bench on which one may sit (at the same level). Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that it refers to one who places a Chumash on top of a Sefer Torah or a Navi on top of a Chumash or a volume of Kesuvim on top of a volume of Neviim. A person who respects the hierarchy of sanctity in Scriptures will be honored and vice versa.

The Chida in his Sefer Chasdei Avos explains this Mishna based on a very strange incident. Two people died on the same day and had their funerals scheduled for the same time. One was a great scholar, a pious and beloved personality. The other was the tax collector in town who was despised by everyone (in an era where the franchise was purchased from the ruler and when tax collectors were known to be unscrupulous and corrupt individuals who squeezed everyone for as much money as they could get out of them).

Everyone in town came to the funeral of the scholar and only the family of the tax collector came to bury their relative. It so happened that the two funeral processions which were moving along in close proximity to one another were attacked by robbers. Everyone abandoned the coffins and fled for their lives except for one disciple of the scholar who managed to hide himself from the robbers. A couple of hours later after the robbers left, the entourage of mourners returned to resume the funeral. Somehow the coffins were mixed up and the large group of people thinking it was the scholar picked up the coffin of the tax collector and the tax collector's family picked up the coffin of the scholar and they proceeded to bury the one with great eulogies and a massive show of respect and the other was buried in a very modest and low-key ceremony by the immediate family of the tax collector.

The disciple who had protested to the people to no avail that they had the wrong coffins was very upset about the matter until his teacher came to him in a dream 3 days later and explained the matter.

'Do not worry. I am in Gan Eden and the tax collector is in Gehinnom [Hell]. What happened, you want to know? One time, I was present when someone shamed another Torah scholar and I did not object. Another time, the tax collector prepared a tremendous feast for the governor who sold him the tax franchise and the governor did not show up. As bad a person as he was, on that occasion the tax collector gave the prepared food to poor Torah scholars so that it not go to waste. I needed to receive my punishment for my oversight and he needed to receive his reward for his kindness.'

The Chidash uses this story to explain the Mishna: Whoever honors the Torah even one time -- even this despicable tax collector -- will receive reward for that effort such that his body will be honored by people. Likewise, anyone who allows Torah to be desecrated, even one time -- as great as he otherwise was -- will receive punishment such that his body will suffer lack of honor by people.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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