

# PARSHAS TERUMAH

*by Dr. Nosson Chayim Leff*

*Sfas Emes, Zechuso Tagein Aleinu, Teruma, 5631*

The Sfas Emes begins by citing the first Medrash Rabbah on the parsha. That Medrash poses the following question. How can one ascertain the nature of a given business deal? (The transaction that the Medrash has in mind is our acquiring the Torah from HaShem.) The Medrash answers: to know the nature of a transaction, look at the commission that the broker received for intermediating it. In the case of the Torah, we can learn about the transaction by considering the commission that Moshe Rabbeinu earned for brokering our receiving the Torah from HaShem. In fact, Moshe's 'commission' was truly extraordinary. When we accepted the Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu's "panim" (face) glowed (Shemos, 34:29). Moshe Rabbeinu's panim shone with such radiance that Moshe had to wear a face-covering when people wanted to talk to him.

What did this shining of Moshe's panim signify? Radiance comes across easily, as enhanced spirituality. But more is going on here. Remember that the word "panim" has two meanings. It means both "face" (i.e., external appearance) and "inner being" (i.e., essence). Moshe's "commission", then, shows what we acquired when we received the Torah -- access to enhanced inner and external spirituality.

(Note: Sefer Koheles generalizes this real-world phenomenon -- that being involved with Torah lishma can transform a person. The pasuk in Koheles (8:1) says: "Chochmas ahdahm ta'ir panav, ve'oz panav ye'shuneh". (ArtScroll: "A man's wisdom lights up his face, and the boldness of his face is transformed".) This generalization is crucial. Why? Because it tells us that the phenomenon of transformation -- "ye'shuneh" -- applies to all people, each at his own level. A person does not have to be a Moshe Rabbeinu to benefit from this growth process.)

The Medrash Rabba that the Sfas Emes is quoting continues: "Sometimes an item is sold, and the vendor himself is included as part of the sale. In this instance, HaShem said to Bnei Yisroel: "I have transferred ownership of my Torah to you. I come along too, as part of the deal". The Medrash continues: "As the posuk says: "Ve'yikchu li" ("And they will acquire me".)

A question: How in the world do the Medrash and the Sfas Emes understand the word "Ve'yikchu" as referring to a sale? The word's obvious translation is: "they will take". And it comes here in the context of collecting resources for building the Mishkan; ("Ve'yikchu li teruma"). How can the Medrash Rabba and the Sfas Emes move us from a collection of resources to a purchase -- and --

sale transaction? To take us even further from the pasuk's p'shat, the transaction that they present is bizarre: a transaction in which the seller -- in this case, HaShem -- goes along with the item being transacted -- in this case, the Torah.

An answer: The Medrash is working with the word 'Ve'yikchu', from the shoresh (root) L'K'Ch'. Chazal's every day language was Aramaic. And in Aramaic, the shoresh L'K'Ch' has the meaning of a purchase or sale. (Some examples: "mekach umemkar" means: buying and selling; "Lekuchos" L'K'CH' -- came across as an obvious allusion to an item being sold.

Following the Sfas Emes, we move to a new line of thought. The Medrash quoted above has told us that when we accept the Torah, HaShem comes along as part of the deal. This idea points to a serious potential problem and/or a serious potential opportunity in our Avoda. The potential pitfall: How easy it is to be a shomer Torah u'mitzvos -- i.e., an apparently observant Jew -- but one who fails to recognize that HaShem can come along together with the mitzvos. Thus, the person does not have a meaningful relationship (one on One) with HaShem. The potential opportunity: To deepen our relationship. HaShem has made us aware that He is available, by telling us that if we accept the Torah, He can come with it, as a bonus of sorts, as part of the deal. Ashreinu!

The Sfas Emes proceeds directly from this Medrash to say: "Ki haTorah nitna leYisrael k'fi hachanas kabalasam". That is, the Torah is given to us in accordance with our preparation to receive it. At first sight, it is totally unclear how this statement fits into the flow of the Sfas Emes's thoughts here. One possible interpretation is the following. The Sfas Emes has been talking of our acceptance of the Torah in terms of a business metaphor. In business transactions, a person can buy more of what he wants if he has more money. The Sfas Emes may be saying, by contrast, how much Torah we receive depends not on our resources, but rather on how much Torah we really want ("k'fi retzono be'emes").

The idea is that notwithstanding HaShem's awesome majesty and distance from us, our relationship with Him depends totally ("hakohl") on us. The Sfas Emes recognizes that this idea is not intuitively self-evident. For this reason, living with this reality requires bitachon (confidence/ trust). Elaborating on this theme, the Sfas Emes cites a pasuk in Tehillim (37:3): "Betach BaShem ve'asei tov; shechohn eretz ure'ei emuna". (R. Hirsch: "Trust in the Lord and do good; rest on earth and nourish faith".) To this pasuk, the Sfas Emes appends a comment from the Zohar. The Zohar tells us that the principal area in our lives in which bitachon should apply is in our Avoda. That is, we should have confidence that HaShem will help us serve Him.

Note that the Sfas Emes seems to have contradicted himself. Earlier, he told us that our relationship with HaShem depends wholly on retzon ha'adahm (the person's volition). Now he says that we should count on HaShem, for He will help us in our Avoda. The Sfas Emes is not afraid of apparent inconsistencies or paradoxes. Indeed, in this paragraph, he goes on to cite more apparent contradictions. Thus, he mentions "emes", (truth - - that which is apparent and explicitly revealed),

and "emuna" (faith -- that which we accept on trust). Similarly, "Make a Mikdash for Me". The word Mikdash comes from "kadosh," which indicates HaShem's separateness from us. And the pasuk continues: "And I will dwell in their midst".

Far from viewing emes and emuna as mutually inconsistent, the Sfas Emes sees them as having the potential for a mutually-supported upward spiral. A person can start the process with emuna. That is, he takes on trust the view that that all life and existence come from HaShem. That perspective is then validated as emes, for the person is then able to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence. In fact, the more emuna that a person has, the more truth about the real world will he have. Thus, as a person becomes aware that everything he has and everything he does exist only because of the Presence of HaShem, he recognizes the kedusha -- sanctity -- of all creation. The person is, in effect, expanding HaShem's Presence in the world.

Unfortunately, the interaction between emuna and emes also operates on the downside, with the possibility of a dreadful downward spiral. That is, if a person does not take the initial step of trusting that HaShem is the Source of all existence, his view of life will be obscured by hester panim ....

Continuing, the Sfas Emes points out the analogy to the relationship between weekdays and Shabbos. To handle the weekdays ("yemei ha'avoda") , we need emuna. And to the degree that we relate to the weekdays with emuna, HaShem will give us access to emes on Shabbos. You see the analogy: emuna is to emes as weekdays are to Shabbos.

We conclude with one more thought of the Sfas Emes. We know that Shabbos is "mei'ein olam haba" -- similar to olam ha'ba (the World to Come). What does this mean? The Sfas Emes explains that the emes that we reach on Shabbos is only a foretaste of the emes that will be revealed to us on when we reach olam ha'ba. One implication: it would be naive to expect much access to metaphysical emes on our own in olam ha'zeh (this World).

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