

PARSHAS TERUMAH: TO ME AND FOR ME

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

"Daber el B'nei Yisroel, v'yikchu li terumah." (Shemos 25:2)

Parshas Terumah begins with a call for individual Jews to step forward and donate the raw materials - gold, silver, and other items -, which were to be used in the building of the Mishkan. "Speak to the B'nei Yisroel," says Hashem to Moshe, "and they shall set aside terumah for Me".

Rashi comments that the word *li*, which would normally mean 'to me' is translated as FOR me in this setting. As the Sifsei Chachomim explains, all items in this world already belong to Hashem. Therefore, the terumah was not given to Hashem, who already possessed it, but rather was donated in His honor (*lishmi*). Rashi offers a similar translation for the word *li* later in this parsha (Shemos 25:8) when Hashem informs the B'nei Yisroel that His Shechinah (Divine Presence) will rest among them once the Mishkan is completed. "V'asu li Mikdash" is translated that the Jews should build a Mishkan FOR Hashem; dedicated to His honor.

The Koheles Yitzchos offers an interesting insight regarding the observation of Rashi that the meaning of the word *li* translates to *lishmi* - FOR my honor. He explains that if an individual gives charity to a poor person, the recipient of the *tzedakah* received assistance irrespective of the donor's motives in giving the gift. It is therefore possible to donate to charity without the purest of intentions and nevertheless derive emotional and spiritual reward for the deed. When one is donating to the Mishkan, however, Hashem is not in need of the items being given. It is only the *nedivas lev*, the willingness to contribute generously that serves as a *nachas ruach* to Hashem. Therefore, the *pasuk* instructs us that when giving terumah to the Mishkan: *li*, since it being given to Hashem (who is not in need of the donations), see to it that your motives are sincere. *Lishmi*; give it for His sake, *l'shem shamayim*.

The word that precedes *li*, *v'yikchu*, (Shemos 25:2) requires careful study as well. We would normally translate the word to mean TAKE. Wouldn't the word *v'yitnu*, and they should GIVE, be more appropriate? The *pasuk* would then read "v'yitnu li terumah, and they should give terumah to Me." After all, the donor is giving the gift, not taking it.

Rashi seems to address this issue when he translates the word *terumah* as a portion that one sets aside (alternatively, *terumah* could mean *to lift*). According to this interpretation, the donor sets aside his gift, and only then presents it to the Mishkan. The Torah instructs us to lend significance to our donation by setting it aside for the purpose of the Mishkan. (The Torah may also be suggesting

to us that setting aside a portion of our income for tzedakah purposes will make it easier for us to make the donation at a later time.)

Several years ago, I received a phone call from a young man who was a talmid of mine when he was in the eighth grade. He had recently married and secured an excellent job in a large N.Y.C. bank. He related to me that as he was preparing to leave his office that day, he was reminded of a mashul (parable) that I had related to him and his classmates more than a decade ago. The theme of the mashul was about the fact that during our years on Earth, we are custodians of the money that Hashem grants us; and as such, we need to share what we have with others. He told me, "Rebbi, I come to the bank each morning and conduct transactions with hundreds of million of dollars of bank funds. Then, I reconcile my accounts and go home with the few dollars and credit cards that I have in my wallet." My talmid mentioned that he thought that this was a powerful metaphor for life, where we transact our business, lead our lives, and leave all of our monetary possessions behind when we depart this world.

Parshas Terumah instructs us to set aside a portion of our money (and time, as we see from all those who donated their talents to benefit the Mishkan) and use it for the service of Hashem and to help those in need. When giving charity becomes part of our daily life, we are not merely giving; we are enriching all aspects of our lives.

This may be another reason for the use of the word âv'yikchu' (Shemos 25:2). When giving to the Mishkan (or other tzedakah), the donor is receiving a mitzvah and the gift of spiritual elevation - adding value and meaning to his or her life.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos.

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