

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת תרומה

דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה מאת כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי
“Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to Me a portion, from every man whose heart will motivate him you shall take My portion” (25:2)

The translation of Onkelos, which is the generally accepted translation, is to "separate" a donation, to give it. Why does the Torah use a language of "to take" a donation? It should say to "give" the donation?! The answer is that when a person gives, he is really also taking. Chazal tell us to realize that when we give charity, the poor are doing more for us than we are doing for the poor. When a poor man comes to ask for money, he provides the wealthy man with an opportunity to do a mitzva. A person who is blessed with wealth should use it for mitzvos. If a person looks at the poor man and is thankful for the chance to use his money for a good purpose, he will approach the act of giving in a much different way. This is how the mitzva of tzedaka is meant to be done. The person who is giving should not think that he is losing money. He really gains much more. In fact, the word נתן, to give, is a palindrome and can be read the same backwards and forward. This hints to the fact that what a person gives will undoubtedly come back to him in due time.

The Malbim offers another explanation. Everything that a person owns comes from Hashem. Only when a person does the right thing with what he has been given does he acquire the true right to take everything else that Hashem has given him. Thus, when a person gives, he is really taking as well because he acquires everything else that he has earned as his own.

This is similar to the idea of blessings on food. When one makes a blessing on food, the food then becomes his to eat. The Gemara in Berachos 35a asks that two verses seem contradictory. One verse says that "To Hashem belongs the world and all that is in it," (Tehillim 24:1) while another verse says "And the land He gave to men" (ibid 115:16). The Gemara resolves the contradiction by stating that the world belongs to Hashem before one makes a blessing. The world belongs to man after he recites a blessing. When one makes a blessing on an item, it becomes his and he acquires the right to benefit from it.

R' Dovid MiKotzk quotes the posuk "For I have given you a good purchase, do not forsake my Torah" (Mishlei 4:2). Why, he asks, is the Torah referred to as a purchase, something that is taken? He answers that one must approach Torah study as a merchant approaches his wares. A merchant has merchandise to sell and, if he does not have anyone to sell to, he will not give up. He will come back the next day and try to sell it again. Torah is the same way. Sometimes, a person will have a day or a week where things do not go so well. He does not feel successful in his learning, he does not enjoy his learning or he is finding it difficult to understand his learning. When this happens, one should not despair. He should continue to try the next day and give it another go. He must treat Torah like merchandise that he must sell and should try again day after day.

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם
“They shall make Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them” (25:8)

Why does the posuk say “so that I may dwell in them” and not “so that I may dwell in it [the Mishkan]?” R’ Chaim Volozhin says that the Mishkan is a prototype for what a person should be. Each and every person is a Mikdash in his own right. Therefore, we must filter what enters our bodies and what we do with ourselves. The Torah commands us to “be holy.” We all have the capabilities to embody holiness because we have the inherent sanctity of a Mikdash. It is not an easy task to achieve but it is our highest goal. When a person makes the effort to transform himself into a Mikdash, Hashem will help him complete the task.

The instructions for the Mishkan conclude with the words "and so shall you do." Rashi says that these seemingly extra words are a commandment to future generations. The Malbim explains that although we may not have a mikdash today, we can still build a sanctuary by making ourselves into a mikdash. This is the Mishkan-task of future generations.

ועשית שנים כרבים זהב מקשה תעשה אתם משני קצות הכפרת

“You shall make two cherubim of gold - beaten shall you make them - from both ends of the lid” (25:18)

The Mechilta writes that all the vessels in the Mishkan could be made from other metals if there was no gold available. The lone exception is the keruvim, cherubim, which must always be of gold. Rashi explains that the keruvim had the faces of small children. R' Meir Shapiro writes that the placement of children on top of the Aron HaKodesh in the Holy of Holies teaches us the importance of educating Jewish children. This is a task that stands in the holiest place. The education of children must be the best, of "gold," at all times, regardless of the circumstances. A child must be educated properly in the manner that he needs, both at home and at school. He cannot be given a second-rate education. The Gemara writes that a person's income is set on Rosh Hashana with the exception of what he spends on Shabbos, Yom Tov, and on teaching one's child Torah. This expense is not a loss, but an extra stipend that does not affect the rest of a person's income. It is also important not to settle for a mediocre Torah education for our children but to give them the gold standard. The children are our future. Chazal tell us that when the time comes for the building of the Third Beis HaMikdash, everyone will go to help with the construction except for the children, who will remain learning Torah. What a child learns in his youth will remain with him forever. Chazal tell us that this is because the world is maintained by the Torah study of young children. Similarly, the Tzror HaMor writes that the keruvim had their wings spread over the Aron just as the children protect the Jewish people.

The Nachal Kedumim writes that the placement of the children on the Aron, which represents Torah study, shows that we must approach Torah with a freshness, like children learning for the first time. The learning of children has a purity that lends it great value. We should attempt to preserve that purity of youth and maintain it throughout our lives. In Parshas Ki Sisa, the Torah calls Yehoshua a "young man," even though he was over fifty years old at the time. This is because he kept this purity of youth throughout his life.

והקמת את המשכן כמשפטו אשר הראית בהר

“You shall erect the Mishkan according to its manner, as you will have been shown at the mountain” (26:30)

Why does the Torah go into great detail regarding the construction of the Mishkan, while many other important laws are only derived from implications and some only learned through the Oral Law? The Torah wants to emphasize that the idea of the Mishkan is to take the gold, silver and copper, the mundane materials of wealth, and to make them holy by using them to bring the Divine Presence into this world. In our everyday life, we can elevate our mundane possessions to a spiritual level. In the materialistic world that we live in, we can learn an important lesson from the construction of the Mishkan. We must seek to make the most of what we own and dedicate our possessions for a higher purpose. This is why the Torah goes into such detail about the construction of the Mishkan.

This is not only true of our property but also of our mundane activities. Even the simplest, most physical things that we do every day can be raised to a higher level. When we eat, we should do so in order to rejuvenate ourselves to serve Hashem. When we sleep, we should have in mind that we want to wake up in the morning refreshed so that we can serve Hashem with a greater intensity. When we are on the road or on the subway, we can spend our time learning and elevate the simple act of going to school or work to a spiritual activity.

[This idea is also one of the central themes of Purim. Purim is much different than Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, we eschew the mundane and focus on spiritual activities. We fast and afflict ourselves while spending the day in prayer. On the other hand, Purim has a limited amount of "spiritual devotion." We spend most of the day enjoying ourselves in a physical manner, through eating and drinking and giving food to friends. Yet, Yom Kippur is only "Yom Kippurim," "a day like Purim," but not quite on the same level as Purim is. This is because when we celebrate our victory in a physical manner, we transform our physicality and uplift it to a spiritual level. This is something even loftier. Man is born with physical needs and drives.

These are not meant to be ignored and starved. Rather, they must be harnessed and used for a spiritual purpose. No human desire is inherently evil. It can become evil when used for the wrong objectives, but it can also become a tool of great spiritual growth. Purim is a day when we emphasize the higher level, a day of celebrating a physical salvation by devoting our physical selves, the target of annihilation on Purim, and using it to thank God for His kindness. It is interesting to note that Purim is almost always on a Sunday, Tuesday or Friday – the three days of the week on which Yom Kippur can never occur. This underscores the two opposing ways of spiritual devotion that we emphasize on these two days.

When we celebrate Purim, we should focus on what we are celebrating. We must not lose sight of the reason for our celebration and let our merrymaking deteriorate into mindless drinking and partying. That is not to say that we should restrict our happiness. Rather, in our immense joy, we should remember that we are doing so because of the miraculous events of Purim. This is why our Sages teach us that Purim is a special day on which one's prayers are readily accepted. When we use physical means for spiritual ends, we raise ourselves to a level even higher than that of Yom Kippur. If Yom Kippur is a special day for prayer and personal improvement, certainly Purim can have an even greater effect upon us if we celebrate it in the right way. - Michael Gutmann]

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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