

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)

Why did Hashem instruct the people to "take" a donation? Wouldn't it make more sense to command that they should "give" a donation? The Tzror HaMor explains that it is important to know that when one does a mitzvah, he does not only do it for Hashem but for his own benefit as well. When a person does a mitzvah, he is taking. One who does a mitzvah gains tremendously. Hashem's mitzvos are not given to us for His pleasure, but for us and for our benefit. The attitude of a donor should not merely be that he is giving, but that he is receiving a benefit that will always be his, an eternal benefit that will give him great pleasure in the World to Come. When a person recognizes this, giving is not so difficult.

אבני שהם ואבני מלאים לאפד ולחשן

“Shoham stones and stones for the settings for the Ephod and the Breastplate” (25:7)

Why are the Avnei Shoham, probably the most valuable of all the materials listed, placed last in the order of items that were to be donated for the construction of the Mishkan? The Or HaChaim gives three answers to this question.

The first answer is based on a law regarding the clothing of the Kohen Gadol. The Rambam writes that meilah (the obligation to bring a korban if one misuses a sacred object) does not apply to the clothing worn by the kohanim. While all the other materials were used in the construction of the Mishkan itself, the Avnei Shoham were only used in the garments. The Avnei Shoham were listed last because they had a lesser degree of sanctity than the other materials, as meilah was never applicable to them.

A second answer is based on Rashi in Parshas Pekudei, who says that the Avnei Shoham fell from the clouds with the daily manna. Since the people did not have to exert any effort to obtain these Avnei Shoham, they are considered less significant than the other materials and are placed at the end of the list. This teaches us an important lesson that effort is sometimes more important than results when serving Hashem. While these Avnei Shoham were the most valuable items of all those donated, since there was no work involved in getting them, they are considered less important.

A third answer stems from who donated these Avnei Shoham. The Torah tells us in Parshas Vayakheil that the Nesiim brought them. However, in that posuk, the word "nesiim" is spelled without a "yud". Chazal explain that their donation was deficient because they said at the outset that they would donate whatever was missing after everyone else donated. They underestimated the people and at the end there was nothing left but Avnei Shoham and a couple of other small items. Since they were lax about donating, their donation of Avnei Shoham is listed last.

R' Gedaliah Schorr, in his sefer Or Gedaliahu, writes that we should learn from this story of the Nesiim that a person has to be honest with himself and know what is really behind what he is saying. When the Nesiim said that they would bring what was missing, it sounded like a great idea but it didn't work out so well. A person needs to make sure he really means well when he has an idea. Is his seemingly good idea based on good intentions or is he deceiving himself and really trying to get off easy while looking good?

ועשו ארון עצי שטים אמתים וחצי ארכו ואמה וחצי רחבו ואמה וחצי קמתו
“They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its lengths; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height” (25:10)

The Midrash Tanchuma, points out that when Hashem told Moshe to make the various vessels in the Mishkan, everything was commanded in singular form, taught to Moshe as an individual. The lone exception is the Aron, the command for which was given in plural, directed toward the nation as a whole. The reason for this is that every single individual has a share in the Torah, which is represented by the Aron. Therefore, the command to build it was directed to the community. Nobody can claim to have done more than his fellow for the Aron because everyone has an equal share in Torah. The Chofetz Chaim adds that the Torah is the property of all the Jewish people. The person who learns Torah has the same share in it as does the person who supports and strengthens Torah. Every person has a portion in it and each should strive to serve Hashem in his own way with the unique talents and abilities that Hashem gave him. No person can say that he does not have to learn Torah or know Torah. The Torah does not belong to a select few individuals. It is the possession of each member of the Jewish people.

ועשית את הקרשים למשכן עצי שטים עמדים
“You shall make the planks for the Tabernacle, shittim wood standing erect” (26:15)

Rashi comments that the Torah needs to write that the boards stood upright so that one should not think that they were placed lengthwise on the ground and piled up high. The Gemara in Sukkah 45b cites the orientation of the boards in the Mishkan as the source for the concept that all mitzvos performed with things that grow from the ground have to be done while holding the item in the way that it grows. For example, one can only fulfill the mitzvah of lulav and esrog while holding them upright. We hold them upside-down before making the bracha so that we do not fulfill the mitzvah at that point. This is learned from the boards which stood upright, just as the wood was upright on the tree. Why is following the way of natural growth a requirement for the fulfillment of a mitzvah?

R' Moshe Feinstein answers that mitzvos need to be done for the purpose of growth. Holding the plants or wood in the way that they grow naturally represents the thought that one mitzvah grows into another mitzvah. It should not be done to get it over with. One should do mitzvos with enthusiasm and with the mindset that he wants to grow through the performance of mitzvos. We hold objects used for mitzvos in a manner that will remind us of this important idea.

Rabbi Friedman further suggests that orienting the object in the way that it grows naturally reminds us that Torah is not unnatural and foreign to a human being. Torah becomes natural to a person over time. Hashem does not ask us to do anything that we cannot do or that is against our nature. Rather a person should work on himself so that Torah becomes a second nature. It is important that the Torah should grow on a person through different stages of his life. As a person gets older, he relates to Torah and mitzvos in different ways. It should not feel forced. If a person works on himself enough, it will come to him naturally, just as the object he holds grows naturally in the way that it is held.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Written by Michael Gutmann