

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of R' Nosson Meir ben R' Yosef Yehoshua, Rabbi Nussie Zemel. "May his Neshama have an Aliya."

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TERUMAH

## Giving Without Getting

*Speak to Bnei Yisroel, that they bring me a terumah (an offering); from every man that gives it willingly with his heart you shall take my terumah. And this is the terumah which you shall take from them [...] (25:2-3).*

This eponymously named *parsha* describes all the gifts that were received from Bnei Yisroel in order to build and operate the Mishkan. Rashi (ad loc) describes why the Torah uses the word *terumah* three times; "The word *terumah* refers to three offerings that are mentioned here, one is the offering of a [half-*shekel*] per head, from which they made the sockets, as is described in [Parshas] *Pekudei*. Another is the offering of a [half-*shekel*] per head for the [community] coffers, which purchased the communal sacrifices, and [the third] is the offering for the building of the Mishkan and the priestly garments, which came from each individual's donation."

Essentially, this *parsha* describes the first fundraising effort of the Jewish people. There is much discussion among the commentaries for the seemingly odd language the Torah uses for receiving these gifts: The verse uses the word "*veyikchu*," which literally means "to take." Why doesn't the Torah use the word "*veyitnu*," which means "to give"? In addition, why when describing receiving the gift does the Torah again use the word "take from them" instead of "receive from them"?

Perhaps even more perplexing is the description of the generosity of the donor: The phrase he must "give it willingly from his heart" accompanies the second offering – the cash reserve to purchase communal sacrifices. Let's examine what this "generosity" entails. The second

offering consisted of a "generous" gift of a half-*shekel*. This would equal roughly .35 ounces of silver, which in today's market would be about \$8.

Bnei Yisroel, having just left Egypt and the Red Sea were fabulously wealthy. In addition, they had very little expenses; they received food and water from Hashem and Chazal say that even their clothes didn't wear out during their time in the desert. Seemingly, only an antisemite would cynically describe this half-*shekel* gift as coming from a "willing heart"!

Often, when people make a significant gift to their *shul* or community organization they do so by dedicating something. In addition, when giving a *bar mitzvah* or wedding gift many people choose to give something other than cash. Worse yet, they often inscribe their name on the *kiddush* cup or book as a reminder of who gave it. Why? What motivates people to try and stay connected to their gift?

People like to give on their own terms. In other words, they want to receive something, anything, in return for their generosity. This lessens the sense of loss and having less. When they go to their *shul* they can look at the window they dedicated and feel that at some level their money isn't totally gone. In essence, contained within the act of giving is also a semblance of receiving. This is why Maimonides (*Matnos Aniyim* 10:7-14) describes that one of the highest levels of



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giving as being a situation where neither giver nor receiver are aware of each other.

Rashi and the Targum (ad loc) translate the word *terumah* as "*hafrasha*," which means to separate. The Torah is giving us the ultimate guide on how we should approach giving: we must separate the gift from our other possessions to the point where it is as if it is being **taken** from us. Rashi (*Vayikra* 23:22) cites the Midrash "that whoever gives to the poor *leket*, *shickcha*, and *pe'ah*, it is as though he built the Beis Hamikdash and sacrificed *korbanos*." Why is this only true by those three types of giving to the poor?

Because every other charity a person gives what they want to part with but with those three the poor come into your fields and take it. You have no control over who gets or how much they get. This is the reason why a "generous willing heart" is required by giving the half-*shekel*. That specific offering went towards buying *korbanos*. Once the *korbanos* are brought on the altar all the money given is gone. This is very different from the two other offerings that went to concrete objects where one could point to something to which they had contributed. Internalizing that the money being given will be gone forever requires "a willing heart," one of generosity.

# What is a Torah Life?

*And they shall make an ark [...] and make upon it a rim of gold around it (25:10-11).*

The Talmud (*Yoma 72b*) explains what this crown represents; "R' Yochanan said, There were three crowns: that of the altar, that of the ark, and that of the table. The one of the altar Aharon merited it and he took it. The one of the table, Dovid merited it and he took it. The one of the ark is still lying available and whosoever wants to take it, may come and take it." Clearly, from here we see that the Torah is available to anyone who wants to acquire it, but what does the Gemara mean by a crown?

A crown represents the very definition of that ideal: Aharon merited to be *kohen gadol* over Moshe and it is only his children who are *kohanim*. Dovid merited being king over Shaul and it is only his children who represent the

true royal lineage.

At Mount Sinai the Jewish people merited receiving the Torah over all the nations of the world. In fact, the Torah was given to each individual at Mount Sinai and each person received a crown of their own at Mount Sinai (though they were removed after the sin of the Golden Calf). The Gemara is teaching us that it is the sacred duty of each and every one of the Jewish people to become a definition of the Torah ideal and to acquire the crown of Torah. What does this mean?

All too often we perceive living a Torah life as keeping all the *mitzvos*. But in reality this is not enough. When Hashem created the world He used the Torah as a blueprint. This means the very structure of the world is the

physical manifestation of the Torah's ideals. So too, in our lives, we must become a living manifestation of the ideals of the Torah. We don't just do acts of kindness, we become compassionate people; we don't merely *daven*, we must actually become servants of Hashem; we don't merely refrain from injuring or causing damage to another living creature, we must be deeply pained when we see injustice or suffering of one of Hashem's creations and do whatever is in our power to rectify it. In other words, it isn't enough to keep the *mitzvos* by rote we must achieve a level where we instinctively embody all of the Torah's ideals. Only then will we both merit and receive the crown of Torah.

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