

TERUMAH

GIVE AND TAKE

Parashas Terumah opens with Hashem's instructions to collect donations for the building of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). “*Daber el Bnei Yisrael veyikchu li terumah mei'eis kol ish asher yidvenu libo tikchu es terumasi* (Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take for Me a donation. From every man whose heart volunteers him you shall take My donation).”¹ The Torah describes the materials that are appropriate to offer and highlights the purpose of all the donations. “*Ve'asu li mikdash veshachanti besocham* (they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them).”² The classic difficulty with this *pasuk* is the wording “they shall **take** for Me a donation.” One would expect it to read, “they shall **give** Me a donation.” The traditional resolution is the following *drush* (homily): a giver actually receives more than he gives. By donating to the building of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), the Jewish people were in effect “taking” because they would benefit personally from their donations.

¹ *Shemos* 25:2.

² *ibid.*, 25:8.

Everything written in the Torah is relevant to our lives. Although we no longer have the *Mishkan*, we still strive to fulfill its purpose. The message of the *Mishkan* is that Hashem's presence can dwell anywhere in the world.³ Let us analyze “*veyikchu li terumah*” – the giving that culminated in “*veshachanti besocham*” – Hashem's presence dwelling in their midst. We will define five conceptual components of the Torah's definition of true giving. Each of these five aspects unveils another layer of meaning of “*veyikchu li terumah.*” This exploration will lead to a meaningful discovery of how to maximize our *tzedakah* opportunities.

Where There's a Will... There's a *Mitzvah*

Before we explore the first idea, we should understand the function of the *Mishkan*. For what ultimate purpose were they collecting donations? The Ramban tells⁴ us that the *Mishkan* was intended to be a physical recreation of the *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai) experience. When the Jews stood at *Har Sinai*, they felt the intensity of G-d's Presence. It was special and powerful, but it was also short-lived. Hashem wanted to transform this unique occasion into an ongoing encounter. The *Mishkan* was a portable *Har Sinai*. G-d's Presence resided in the *Mishkan* just as it did on *Har Sinai*. G-d spoke to Moshe from the *Mishkan* in the same way He did from *Har Sinai*.

Rabbi Moshe Reiss highlights⁵ a critical difference between the *Mishkan* and *Har Sinai*. The *Har Sinai* experience was entirely

³ Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, *Kol Dodi* on the Torah, p. 149.

⁴ Commentary on *Parashas Terumah*, introduction.

⁵ *MeiRosh Tzurim*, p. 263.

Hashem's initiative. Hashem brought the glory of His *Shechinah* (Presence) down to us, and the Jews simply prepared themselves to receive it. The *Mishkan*, on the other hand, was a human creative enterprise. We needed to create a space for the *Shechinah* amongst us by donating the materials, completing the artistic work and erecting the structure. We deduce, therefore, that Hashem's Presence was drawn into the *Mishkan* by our desire to have Him.

The physical materials donated were required as an external manifestation of the internal aspiration. In truth, the edifice was built out of love for Hashem. It is written in *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs), "King Solomon made a palace for himself from the trees of the Levanon. Its pillars he made of silver, its sheets of gold, its canopy of indigo. Its inside was burning with love from the daughters of Jerusalem."⁶ Rashi explains⁷ that these verses allude to the building of the *Mishkan*. The *Mishkan* was built from the highest quality materials – gold, silver, indigo – but that was not what built the *Mishkan* in essence; that was just the outward expression. If you looked inside for that essence, you saw it: the inside was pulsating with love! The Jews donated these valuable materials as an expression of their "burning love" for Hashem.

External actions are merely a reflection of an internal desire. In this way, our *mitzvos* should indicate our longing to be close to Hashem. We often invest much time and energy in the technical details of the *mitzvah*, but then forget the purpose of *mitzvos* in general. Rabbi Itamar Schwartz points out⁸ that the word *mitzvah* is related to the word *tzavta* (bond). The value of

⁶ *Shir HaShirim* 3:9-10.

⁷ *Commentary on Shir HaShirim* 3:9.

⁸ *BiLevavi Mishkan Evneh*, p. 11.

the physical act of the *mitzvah* is dependent on how it builds a Divine connection. Just like the Jews donated silver and gold to express their love for Hashem, the physical deed is the *Olam HaZeh* building-block of the relationship. The actions are just a means to a spiritual end. If our ultimate goal is not to forge a connection with G-d, then we are missing the point. The true value of a *mitzvah* lies in the *ratzon* (desire) for a deep relationship with Hashem.

We now understand that the first aspect of giving is the concept of *ratzon*. The “take” in “they shall take for me a donation” means that we need to take – and donate – ourselves to Hashem. “*Veyikchu li terumah*” is taking the deepest part of ourselves, our *ratzon*, and putting it into every *mitzvah* we do. Only then will a *mitzvah* fulfill its purpose of *tzavta*, connection with Hashem.

Putting the Heart into It

Rabbi Yitzchak Krieser⁹ explains why giving with *ratzon* is so essential. He notes, based on the *Chasam Sofer*, that *ratzon* is the only part of ourselves that we can truly give. Note the verse that specifies from whom the contributions are to be taken: “*Mei’eis kol ish asher yidvenu libo tikchu es terumasi* (from every man whose heart volunteers him you shall take My donation).”¹⁰ Why is the desire of one’s heart a critical component of the giving? Are the gold and silver of more reluctant donors worthless?

This verse teaches that our heart’s desire to give is the only thing that is ours to offer! Not just gold and silver, but the entire

⁹ *Ish LeRei’eihu*, p. 370.

¹⁰ *Shemos* 25:2.

physical world belongs to Hashem. Offering Hashem material things is merely giving what is already His. True giving, therefore, is dedicating our heart's desires and our will to Hashem.

In that light, Rabbi Krieser explains the *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos*: “Rabi says... Take care with a minor *mitzvah* as with a major [one], because you do not know the reward of *mitzvos*.”¹¹ The simple reading is as follows: we need to be careful to fulfill a minor *mitzvah* because we aren't aware of the potential reward we could lose. Rabbi Krieser says we should instead interpret this *mishnah* as a warning to “take care” because the amount of care taken determines the reward! We are mistaken to think that there is a predetermined, objective compensation for every particular *mitzvah*. This *mishnah* teaches us that we “don't know the reward,” meaning that we don't realize that the reward is proportional to the effort. Our investment in the *mitzvah* process establishes our consequential merit. When a person fulfills an “easy” *mitzvah* with all of his exertion and attention, he earns greater reward than when he routinely fulfills a “difficult” *mitzvah* by rote.

We will illustrate this idea with the examples of *Kri'as Shema* as the easy *mitzvah* and keeping *Shabbos* as the difficult *mitzvah*. After all, to keep *Shabbos* on the most basic level you need to know hundreds of *halachos* (Jewish laws), while to perform the *mitzvah* of *Kri'as Shema* on the most basic level all you need to do is recite the three paragraphs and understand the meaning of the first six words. But the more effort one puts in to this “easy” *mitzvah*, the more valuable it becomes. If a person were to “take care” in *Kri'as Shema*, he might first try to understand all three

¹¹ *Pirkei Avos* 2:1.

paragraphs. If he takes more care, he will remember that our Sages said that *Kri'as Shema* is *kabbalas ol malchus shamayim* (accepting the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven). While saying the words, he now concentrates on committing himself to serving Hashem. He might then be inspired to carefully pronounce each word correctly, emphasizing the right syllables. He will even focus on how much he loves Hashem when he says “*Ve’abavta es Hashem Elokecha* (and you shall love Hashem your G-d)”¹² in the first paragraph.

Each step such a person takes elevates the *mitzvah’s* status further, because it accrues more value. With each extra layer of investment, he earns more merit. Why? Each level of care he applies to the *mitzvah* doesn’t change the *mitzvah* itself, rather it changes **him**. His increased effort and investment in the *mitzvah* raises his level of G-d-consciousness. His *mitzvah* becomes his *tzavta*, his connection with Hashem.

Now contrast the above scenario with our example of a difficult *mitzvah*, keeping *Shabbos*. Keeping *Shabbos* might entail many detailed laws, but what if we observe them without too much thought or investment? It might be embarrassing to admit, but we often find ourselves mindlessly going through the *Shabbos* routine, *okay, light the candles... okay, let’s make kiddush...now we wash for challah...pass it around...*

On one hand, routines are helpful tools for remembering our responsibilities; that is why we promote fixed times for Torah learning and *davening*. But we must be careful not to misuse them, as *mitzvos* performed by rote have only very basic value. Does that mumbled *kiddush* really sanctify the day of *Shabbos*? Is Hashem even mentioned at your *Shabbos* table? The

¹² *Devarim* 6:5.

misnah in *Pirkei Avos* guides us. Exert yourself when performing both “easy” and “difficult” *mitzvos* alike. Your investment will determine the reward.

Distribution Curve

Our second concept about giving relates to the previously mentioned idea that our resources are not really ours. Our resources were given to us by Hashem as a deposit; in reality, our assets are a divine trust fund. The Vilna Gaon comments¹³ that money is given to a person to use for acts of kindness. A person, then, is considered only a *gabbai*, an emissary for performing these acts.

There is a hint to this concept in the *halachos* of inheritance. If a man with several sons bequeaths all of his property to only one son, we understand that the man was appointing that son as a legal guardian; that son’s responsibility is to distribute the inheritance among all of the children. This *halachah* is based on the assumption that the man did not intentionally treat his children disproportionately. From here we learn why Hashem gave some of His children significantly more assets than others. He would never care for His children in an unbalanced way. We can assume that He was appointing some of us as legal guardians to distribute His resources among all His children.

Bnei Yisrael are the beloved children of Hashem. We are one family, likened to the parts of one body. Rabbi Shimon Shkop explains¹⁴ that all physical resources belong to *Klal Yisrael* as a

¹³ Commentary to *Yonah* 2:9.

¹⁴ Quoted in *Matnas Chaim, Kuntres VeShaveha BiTzedakah*, by Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon, p. 72.

whole. Hashem's money is put in individual pockets simply for distribution purposes. In the human body, the stomach receives all the nutrients and the lungs draw in all the oxygen. But, of course, they don't retain the nourishment only for themselves. These organs circulate the nutrients and oxygen throughout the body, rationing to each limb according to its needs. The nutrients and the oxygen are intended for the entire body. So too, when the wealthy provide for the poor, they are distributing G-d-given sustenance to all parts of the body of *Klal Yisrael*. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler notes¹⁵ that someone who understands that he is only Hashem's distributor will apportion his money for personal use and for *tzedakah* according to the same standard. Each person will be given what he truly needs. Spending lavishly on himself while giving stingily to the poor is considered stealing.

This idea relates to our daily lives. We hear a knock at our door; when we open it, we see someone standing there asking for money. What is our reaction? Do we realize that we are giving him the money that belongs to him? We should see ourselves as children being told by our parents, "Here, take some money and please divide it up among your siblings." We are all Hashem's children and this person at the door is "*achicha ha'evyon* (your destitute brother)."¹⁶ *He is my sibling, and I'm giving him the money that my parent gave me for him. It's not my money! It's money that was intended for him. I am just the one who is responsible for the distribution.*

¹⁵ *Michtav Mei'Eliyahu*, vol. 4, p. 296-297.

¹⁶ *Devarim* 15:7.

“*Veyikchu li terumah*” – you shall take – take from the fund that you have in your possession and then distribute it responsibly and appropriately.

Our role as Hashem’s *gabba’ei tzedakah* (charity distributors) is both a lofty privilege and weighty responsibility. If we are not responsible caretakers of Hashem’s bounty, we might lose our position. Hashem sends us warning in mysterious ways. There are many reasons why people experience hardships with money, some positive and some negative. We can never be certain that our financial loss was not caused by our neglect the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* (charity). Of course, it is not our place to make such conclusions about others’ money, but sometimes our own financial crisis is intended to be a wakeup call to evaluate our giving.

Yours Forever

Interestingly enough, although our money does not really belong to us, once we give it to *tzedakah*, it then does become ours, but in a more meaningful way. We will explain this idea, as we explore a third concept regarding giving and its rewards.

The *Talmud* tells¹⁷ us about King Munbaz, who owned vast wealth – assets he had collected himself, and assets inherited from his ancestors. One year there was a famine, and Munbaz used this money to provide for the people during the crisis. His family severely criticized him, saying, “Your ancestors saved all that money and passed it down through many generations. How could you waste the ancestral inheritance?!” Munbaz replied, “My forefathers have stored this money down here; I’ve stored

¹⁷ *Bava Basra* 11a.

the money up in heaven. My forefathers have stored the money in a place where others can get it; I stored it where nobody can touch it. My forefathers stored it for others; I stored it for myself.” King Munbaz was saying that his forefathers passed the money down generation after generation. They never reaped the benefits of their hoarding, so the money was never really theirs. Eventually they died and the wealth was passed along to other hands. But now that Munbaz did a *mitzvah* with this money, he will reap the benefits of that treasure eternally. No one can ever touch it.

Our Sages tell¹⁸ us, “*Yoseir mimah sheba'al habayis oseh im be'ani, be'ani oseh im ba'al habayis* (more than the owner of the home [meaning an established member of the community] does for the poor person, the poor person does for the owner of the home).” A needy person comes knocking at the door; the home owner opens it and gives him some money. The common perception is that the owner is giving and the poor person is receiving. According to our Sages, that is a superficial interpretation. In truth, the solicitor is the giver, because he is giving the owner an opportunity to earn eternity. “*Veyikchu li terumah*” means that when we give, we are really taking. Money that is given becomes truly ours. Our *tzedakah* turns into an eternal reward, permanently stored in a treasure house. No one can ever take it away from us.

Give to Become a Giver

Givers receive much more than a future reward. Giving *tzedakah* rewards us in the present by changing us profoundly.

¹⁸ *Rus Rabbah* 5:9.

The Rambam warns¹⁹ us to be careful with the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, more so than with any other positive commandment. Why? One reason he gives is that *tzedakah* is considered to be the sign that someone is a descendant of Avraham Avinu. By contrast, someone who neglects this *mitzvah* is called a *bliya'al*, a lawless person, and is compared to an idol worshipper. Further, he is branded an evil-doer and a sinner. These are strong labels for someone who ignores a positive commandment. Why is this *mitzvah* so important?

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon explains²⁰ that the assumed purpose of the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is to support the poor. Hashem has compassion on the downtrodden and, therefore, He commanded us to support them. This assumption, however, is a bit illogical. Hashem is compassionate and can do anything, so he is able to provide sustenance in any way He chooses. Why did Hashem make the poor dependent on the generosity of others? This same question was posed to Rabbi Akiva by Turnus Rufus.²¹ “If your G-d loves the poor, why doesn’t He provide for them?” Rabbi Akiva answered, “In order to save us from the judgment of *Gehinnom* by means of them.” Hashem created poverty and instructed us to give, for our sake. By giving *tzedakah*, we learn how to be kind and sensitive people.

This reason can be deduced from the repetition of two particular words in the *parashah* discussing the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*: “*achicha* (your brother),” and “*levavcha* (your heart).”²² The emphasis is not just on the act of giving, but on the way we give. We need to feel in our hearts that the poor person is our

¹⁹ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Matnos Aniyim* 10:1-3.

²⁰ *Matnas Chaim, Kuntres VeShaveba BiTzedakah*, p. 28.

²¹ *Bava Basra* 10a.

²² *Devarim* 15:7-12.

brother. Our obligation is to feel an emotional connection and give compassionately with an open hand.

As previously mentioned, the purpose of *mitzvos* is to connect us with Hashem. Our Divine connection is formed in particular when we emulate His *middos*. In the case of the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, when we focus on the purpose of giving, we refine our character traits of kindness and compassion. Our benevolent actions influence who we are. “*Veyikchu li terumah*” – we take the reward of the *mitzvah* with us forever, but the most immediate and lasting return is our improved selves.

Realistically speaking, *tzedakah* opportunities often raise our doubts about the worthiness of the recipient. How do we know that the person at our door is a legitimate case? Sometimes they present a letter to justify their cause, but what if they do not? Whether or not one should give the money is very individual to the situation, and is beyond the scope of this essay. Let us identify instead a common error in perspective when faced with this scenario.

If all that occupies our minds is, “Does he deserve my money?” we are missing the point. It is not about him – it is about us! But let’s focus on our perspective: when we ask “does he deserve my money,” that’s a mistake. It’s not about him – it’s about us! An opportunity is standing on the other side of the door – an opportunity sent by G-d to develop our character. Let us respond to these opportunities and use them for their intended purpose. No matter what we decide to do monetarily, we can always give the collector a smile, or a *berachah* (blessing), or offer him a drink. Our goal is to see him as our brother and to open up our hearts – to develop our sensitivity and respect.

From here we see that the worthiness of the recipient is unrelated to the value of *tzedakah*-giving. Based upon that

insight, we see that other seemingly-relevant factors are also not of central importance. One might think that giving more money is a greater *mitzvah*, since more resources equals more assistance to the needy. However, based on what we have learned, we now understand that the amount of money given is not as critical as the frequency of the action. When choosing between donating a \$100 bill once or a \$1 bill one hundred different times, one should opt for giving the smaller amount multiple times. Every time one gives, the heart opens more, and that is what *tzedakah* is about. By giving frequently, no matter what the sum is, we accustom ourselves to donating without reluctance. We become joyful givers and truly gain from our giving.

The Best Investment

The first two aspects of our discussion taught us to nurture an inner desire to give and realize that we are just the distributors of Hashem's bounty. The third component illustrates the eternal spiritual rewards we reap from giving. Now let us explore the fourth concept, how becoming generous people has a practical effect in this world.

The Torah promises,²³ "Give to him [the poor] and your heart shall not be evil in your giving to him, for it is because of this thing that Hashem will bless you in every action of yours and in every enterprise of your hands." Giving *tzedakah* brings physical blessing to the donor. Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon explains²⁴ that this gift is not a detached reward, but rather Hashem's law of nature. In our *tefillah*, we say Hashem is "*zorei'a*

²³ *Devarim* 15:10.

²⁴ *Matnas Chaim, Kuntres Veshaveha Bitzedakah*, p. 38.

tzedakos, *matzmi'ach yeshu'os* (planting *tzedakah* and causing salvation to sprout). How can we understand the imagery of this prayer? If one plants an apple seed, the natural result is the eventual growth of an apple tree. Rabbi Salomon explains simply that if one gives *tzedakah*, Hashem will “plant” it – remember it and nurture it. In time, the natural result will be that salvation will sprout forth.

Sometimes, salvation arrives quicker than we would expect. This following true story was told by someone who was directly involved. One day, a Jewish contractor was giving his Arab worker a ride home. As the worker exited the truck, an Arab thief jumped in, pushed the contractor out the door and drove off. The contractor’s wife was naturally distraught. She shared the distressing situation with her *rebbetzin*. “My husband’s whole livelihood was in that truck! The truck and the tools are worth thousands of *shekels*! We cannot afford to replace them. What is our *avodas Hashem* right now? What should we do?”

The *rebbetzin* answered her with the following story:

A distressed woman had approached the *rebbetzin* with a tale of woe. Everything in her house seemed to be in a state of disrepair. First, it was the washing machine that broke, then the oven stopped functioning, and this went on with several other appliances. Beyond the financial burden, the woman was desperate to understand why it was happening. Despite the family’s increased Torah learning and prayer, the breakdowns continued. The *rebbetzin* told her about the concept of “*tzedakah tatzil mimaves* (charity will save from death)”²⁵ – charity has the power to annul difficult decrees. One can never lose by giving charity, even if one is under financial stress.

²⁵ *Mishlei* 10:2.

The next week the woman returned to the *rebbetzin* elated. She had taken the *rebbetzin's* advice and had given a community *chessed* activist a large sum, despite the recent financial pressure. That same day, their family's health insurance group informed them that, due to a billing mistake, they had accidentally been charged double over a long period of time. They were to receive thousands of *shekels* in compensation.

The *rebbetzin* looked thoughtfully at the contractor's wife and said, "I will tell you what I told her. You never lose by giving *tzedakah*." The contractor's wife took the story to heart. Shortly thereafter, a local *tzedakah* organization was holding a fundraising raffle and this woman decided to give *tzedakah* by buying some tickets. They won second prize: 10,000 *shekels*, with which they bought another truck and filled it with new tools for her husband's contracting business.

It sounds astonishing, but Hashem's promise has been proven true over and over again. Even when we hear incredible stories like these, in which Hashem's Hand is so clear, we still think of them as unusual occurrences. We often consider them to be the exception instead of the rule. Even if we know the story is authentic, the voice of our inner cynic often says, "These kinds of things never happen to me." Here is where our *emunah* often wanes. If powerful stories don't convince us to believe in Hashem's promises, then our intellect should.

The Torah makes a guarantee: "Because of this thing Hashem will bless you in every action of yours and in every enterprise of your hands."²⁶ *Emunah* means believing that Hashem's promises will be fulfilled, even if it appears to be counter-intuitive or even impossible. It seems completely

²⁶ *Devarim* 15:10.

illogical that giving away money (to *tzedakah*) could really earn us a profit (namely, future financial rewards). But if we have *emunah*, we understand that He will cause it to happen somehow, even if the reward doesn't make an immediate or dramatic appearance.

“*Veyikchu li terumah*” – when you give *tzedakah*, you eventually will take the physical blessing that Hashem will bestow upon you. Sometimes we see it as clearly, as in the above stories, but sometimes salvation comes much later or in more subtle ways. Nevertheless, the guarantee is solid: a person never loses by giving *tzedakah*.

Weakness of *emunah* in this area has serious ramifications. Consider the Rema's comment about a person's attitude about charity. “One should never brag about the *tzedakah* one gives. And if one brags, not only does one not receive reward, but one is punished for it.”²⁷ As the Rema subsequently points out, boasting about charity does not mean a donor's recognition plaque, which is considered acceptable when it inspires other to give generously. Rather, he is referring to a person who habitually brags about his donations. *Whew – I just gave \$10,000 to tzedakah!* Even so, we might expect a boastful donor to lose the reward of a *mitzvah*, but not to be actively punished! Why are there harsh consequences for a not-so-humble giver?

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon explains²⁸ that in general, bragging about *mitzvos* indicates that they were performed for an audience, to impress other people. Therefore, a person loses the *lishmah* element (the purity of intentions), but still has the *mitzvah*. Unique to the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, however, is that

²⁷ *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah*, 249:13.

²⁸ *Matnas Chaim, Kuntres VeShaveha BiTzedakah*, p. 38.

boasting about it is actually renouncing Hashem. How so? When we brag about how much money we lost for the sake of the *mitzvah*, we are denying G-d's word. After all, G-d promised us that our giving *tzedakah* will be rewarded with financial blessing. Boasting about giving *tzedakah* is an indication that the donor considered his gift to be a loss of money; he obviously does not have *emunah* that *tzedakah* results in G-d-given financial gain. A lack of *emunah* leads to the denial of Hashem's word and for this, one deserves punishment. We now understand why the Rambam, as mentioned above, compares the neglect of the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* to idol worship.

This fourth aspect of giving helps us analyze our perspective of *tzedakah* and assess our *emunah* in Hashem's promises. What is the litmus test of our real attitude to *tzedakah*? When we are approaching our home and we spot *tzedakah* collectors leaving our front door, what do we think: "*Phew, perfect timing! I'm glad I missed those tzedakah collectors*"? Or do we run after them: "*Please wait a minute, I'd like to give you something*"? We can talk about the greatness of giving *tzedakah*, but it is our actual response that indicates our genuine beliefs. Does our *tzedakah* behavior demonstrate *emunah*? We need to adopt the perspective that by giving *tzedakah*, we are making the best spiritual and financial investment possible.

Elevate the Physical

The final component is realizing the spiritual effect of giving. The *Imrei Chemed* explains²⁹ the words of the *Chiddushei HaRim* about giving *ma'aser* (tithes of food given to the poor).

²⁹ Rabbi Moshe Chayim Dandrovitz, *Imrei Chemed*, p. 134.

The *Chiddushei HaRim* says that when one gives *ma'aser*, an impression of sanctity is made on the rest of the food. In other words, the remaining food becomes more spiritual in nature. The inherent spiritual danger of eating is that the act of consumption will make the eater more animalistic and attached to physicality. By giving *ma'aser*, the remaining food is spiritually elevated and the risk to the consumer is eliminated.

The same holds true, he continues, for the donation to the *Mishkan*. “*Veyikchu li terumah*” – by giving some of their assets to a divine cause, the Jews took their remaining assets to a higher level. The rest of their possessions acquired an aura of *kedushah*. Giving *tzedakah* enables us to utilize the rest of our money in a spiritual way, for *avodas Hashem*.

True Tzedakah

“*Veyikchu li terumah*” – what do we take when we give? Let us summarize the progression of the five elements of true giving. We give our inner selves, because only our *ratzon* is truly ours to give. The entire physical world is Hashem’s, so our money does not really belong to us. We are responsible to distribute Hashem’s bounty, because it was given to us as a trust fund. Giving *tzedakah* is, on a deeper level, taking our money into our possession eternally, both as a heavenly reward and in the refinement of our *middos*. Hashem will also bestow physical blessings on us when we give. Finally, spiritual blessings will sanctify the remainder of our possessions to bring us closer to Hashem. In light of all of the above, the inescapable conclusion is “*veyikchu li terumah*” – we must be aware that our giving is really taking and it is all for our own benefit.

Give for the *Ge'ulah*

Parashas Terumah is usually read at the beginning of the month of *Adar*. On the first of *Adar*, messengers used to be sent to all the communities in *Eretz Yisrael* to remind people to give the half-*shekel* toward the expenses of the *Beis Hamikdash*.³⁰ In our times, *tzedakah* takes the place of the *mitzvah* of the half-*shekel* donation.³¹ *Adar* was established by our Sages as a time of giving, with the special *mitzvah* of *matanos la'evyonim* (gifts to the poor) on *Purim*. Giving *tzedakah* is the theme of this time of the year.

The *Sefas Emes* elaborates³² on the connection between giving *tzedakah* and the month of *Adar*. Since *Nissan* is “*rosh chodashim* (the head of the months),”³³ *Adar* is, in this regard, the last month of the year. *Elul* is parallel to *Adar* because *Elul* is the last month of the calendar year. Just as *Elul* is a time of *teshuvah* (repentance), so too is *Adar*. The difference is that the *teshuvah* of *Elul* prepares us for the *yamim noraim* – the Days of Awe. By contrast, the special focus of *Adar* is *teshuvah mei'ahavah* – repentance out of love for Hashem. The *Sefas Emes* says that giving the half-*shekel* was not just for practical purposes. Donating money to the *Beis Hamikdash* is a particularly appropriate means for us to express our love for Hashem. It arouses our desire to give and to use all of our possessions *leshem Shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven).

By taking advantage of the *teshuvah* opportunities in *Adar*, we prepare for *Nissan*. *Nissan* has the potential for *ge'ulah*. But

³⁰ *Yerushalmi, Shekalim* 1:1.

³¹ *Bava Basra* 9a.

³² 5631, *parashas Shekalim*.

³³ *Shemos* 12:2.

when will that *ge'ulah* come? The *Talmud* tells³⁴ us that “Yerushalayim will only be redeemed through *tzedakah*.” By elevating ourselves into true givers whose giving is “*tocho ratzuf ahavah* (its inside is burning with love),”³⁵ we will be able to connect to Hashem through love. When we have built this space of divine love in our hearts, we will be privileged to see it clearly in a world redeemed. “*Ve'asu li mikdash veshachanti besocham* (they shall make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them).”³⁶

³⁴ *Sanhedrin* 98a.

³⁵ *Shir HaShirim* 3:10.

³⁶ *Shemos* 25:8.