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Esther *bas* Mordechai *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Give-and-Take of Donations

PARSHAS TERUMAH 5777

This week’s *parshah* begins with something of a linguistic twist. The call is issued to donate materials for the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). One would have expected the directive to be worded in terms of **giving**, along the lines of: וַיִּתְּנוּלִי תְרוּמָה – And they shall **give** Me a donation.” Instead, the *passuk* employs the very opposite term; as it states: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּלִי תְרוּמָה (Shemos 25:2). What could account for this curious shift? While the issue is taken up by a host of commentators, we present here just a few intriguing approaches.

Value of a Gift

Drawing from the halachic topic of *kiddushin* (betrothal), the *Panim Yafos* (*parshas Terumah*) offers an innovative explanation. A standard form of betrothal entails an actual monetary transaction, as laid out in the Mishnah in Kiddushin (1:1):

הָאִשָּׁה נִקְנִית... בְּכֶסֶף... בֵּית שְׁמַאי אוֹמְרִים בְּדִינָר וּבְשֵׁוֹה דִינָר, וּבֵית הַלֵּל אוֹמְרִים בְּכֶרֶט וּבְשֵׁוֹה כֶּרֶט.
“A wife is acquired... through money... (Of what value?) Beis Shamai says: A *dinar* (coin) or something of equivalent worth. Beis Hillel says: A *perutah* (coin) or something of equivalent worth.”

The precise value indicated by the positions of Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel are beyond the purview of our current discussion. But what concerns us for the moment is the simple fact emerging from the Mishnah that, to effect a betrothal, the groom presents the bride with an object of monetary value, in return for which she acquiesces to the arrangement. Thereby, through “*keseif*” he acquires her as a wife.

Interestingly enough, however, we encounter a scenario appearing to involve a reversal of roles, whereby the *bride* actually presents the *groom* with a gift; nonetheless, the betrothal is deemed viable. As the Gemara states: הִילָךְ מִנָּה וַאֲקַדֵּשׁ אֶנִּי לָךְ... מְקוּדָשֶׁת – “(If she says to him:) ‘Behold, I give you this money; in return, I shall betroth myself to you’... (the transaction is valid and) she is considered betrothed” (*Kiddushin 7a*).

The obvious question, of course, is how such an arrangement is possible; after all, it seems to be missing the key element of the groom offering something of value to the prospective bride. Thus the Gemara concludes that the ruling actually centers around a specific case. True, under regular circumstances such a transaction would indeed be invalid, for this very reason: the groom failed to provide any valued object to earn the hand of the bride. What is spoken of here, however, is where the groom was a particularly prestigious personage – an “*adam chashuv*.” Giving a gift in such an instance is deemed a privilege on the part of the giver – and this itself serves as the requisite “object of value.” As the Gemara states: מִקְבֵּל מִתְּנָה מִיָּנָה גְּמָרָה וּמִקְנָא לִיה נִפְשָׁה – “From the pleasure (she receives from the fact that this prestigious personage) agrees to accept her proffered gift, she acquiesces and transfers herself into his domain.”

The *Panim Yafos* elucidates our subject by applying this very idea. Certainly, a gift accepted by the Almighty Himself provides the giver an even greater measure of pleasure! As such, a donation given for Hashem’s sake in fact constitutes a real gain for the donor. In a similar

manner to the bride of the Gemara's scenario, by "giving" the donation, he is effectively "receiving."

Sweet Surprise

The Beis Halevi (*parshas Terumah*) takes a somewhat different tack. In addressing the commentators' question, he clarifies the true nature of our relationship with material acquisitions.

As an illustrative example, the Beis Halevi depicts a scenario involving a fly. As is their wont, this fly was flying and ambling around, zipping in and out of various nooks and crannies. At one point, the fly found himself inside a jar, when suddenly, the lid is sealed shut by the unsuspecting housewife.

Trapped inside, the fly was initially despondent. To his surprise, however, he discovered that the jar contained something very valuable – a cube of sugar. What a windfall! Such an item could provide him with sweet sustenance for a long time to come.

Could this fly, wonders the Beis Halevi, truly consider himself wealthy? That would be an obvious folly; after all, he did nothing to procure it, but rather, just happened to be stuck with it in the same jar. Sure, he might insert his proboscis from time to time to extract some nourishment, but in no way can this item be truly considered his own.

So it is, concludes the Beis Halevi, with all of our possessions. A man may have been blessed with great wealth; but in truth, it is not his. He was merely stuck with it in his little corner of This World. Perhaps he "noshes" on it from time to time; but that does not make it truly "his." לִי הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב נֵאָמַר ד' – "Mine is the silver, and Mine is the gold," says Hashem" (*Chagai* 2:8). Whatever riches a person may have has merely been placed in his vicinity by Hashem. Only when those monies are put to use in accordance with the will of the Depositor has the individual made a true "acquisition." In other words, states the Beis Halevi, it is money that is dispensed for charitable purposes that is considered truly one's own.

King Munbaz, the righteous Hasmonean monarch, makes this very point. Chazal relate how he spent his considerable wealth to feed the starving people during a prolonged period of famine. For this he was chided by his royal relatives, who castigated him for depleting the royal treasure. The king replied by noting a stark distinction. He characterized his deed thusly: אֲבוֹתַי גָּזְזוּ לְאַחֵרִים וְאֲנִי גָּזַזְתִּי לְעַצְמִי, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְלָךְ תִּהְיֶה צְדָקָה – "My ancestors accumulated wealth (to ultimately be left) for others, whereas I accumulated it **for my own behalf**; as it states (*Devarim* 24:13): 'And charity shall be for you'" (*Bava Basra* 11a).

This reality is reflected in the opening verse of the *parshah*. It is for this reason that the donations for the Mishkan were framed in terms of "taking" and not "giving." In truth, real "acquisition" comes about only by expending one's wealth for sacred purposes.

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