



## What is My Special Gift to Offer the World?

### My Mitzvah Dilemma

I'm privileged to live in a community with countless women of valor, overflowing with *chesed* (kindness) and care for one another. When a woman gives birth, the women of my community ensure that hot, wholesome meals are arranged for a full week or more. They visit the sick, comfort the mourners, mend the brokenhearted, bake cakes for each other's celebrations, recite numerous *Tehillim* (Psalms), arrange communal prayers for women and the list goes on. It was inspiring to be part of a Prayer Vigil for the healing of one of the women in our community, the other day at Rachel's Tomb. For me, that was a onetime occurrence – pushing myself to take the time off from work to join my righteous community of women. Here is where my dilemma pursues me. I've been torn for so many years about how to best contribute of my precious time. While all these women of valor are busy reaching out helping a new immigrant settle in the land, collecting money for a poor bride, baking and delivering goodies to lone soldiers etc., I sit nailed to my computer, crossing my Ts, and adding yet another dot to the I. Nobody told me I have to write, rewrite, reorganize writings, reformat, fix up, add and delete. Computers and smart phones are surely addictive. There are so many mitzvot to do and life is short. Do I really want to spend it checking and rechecking my emails?

### The Heart Compass Preventing Us from Getting Lost in the Sea of Mitzvot

In *Parashat Terumah* every Israelite was prompted to give of him or herself to the community in order to build the *Mishkan* – dwelling place for Hashem in this lower world.

**ספר שמות פרק כה פסוק ב דבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָקָחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לִבּוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמָתִי:**

“Speak to the children of Israel, and have them take for Me an offering; from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering” (*Shemot* 25:2).

The required giving is not a compulsory donation but rather it must be a gift from the heart. Rashi explains the expression **לִבּוֹ יִדְבְּנוּ** / *vidvenu libo* – “whose heart inspires him” to be an expression of good will – a present. Similarly, the Ohr Hachaim explains that the extra letter *vav* in the word **וְיָקָחוּ** / *vayikchu* – “and take” hints to the fact that something else preceded the compulsory contribution – it is the spirit of generosity mentioned in the verse. Hashem desires that each kind of contribution to the building of the *Mishkan* be from the heart. A person should not contribute until he first feels a spirit of generosity in his heart. Although, it states, “Greater is the one who is commanded, and then acts, than the one who does so on his or her own initiative” (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Kama* 38a), Hashem desires our heart (*ibid. Sanhedrin* 106b). It is easy to get lost and overwhelmed in the sea of mitzvot. The need for help is so great, from voting for friends at a community meeting to taking care of your neighbor's children while she attends to an emergency. We can't possibly fulfil all the possible ways of donating in our time. Whenever we cannot motivate our heart in response to a certain requested voluntary act of kindness, we may want to think twice about whether this particular act is the best use of our time. If we act out of a feeling of, “I have to,” “I should” or “what will the neighbors think if I don't...,” our action will surely be inadequate. For example, if I take care of my neighbor's kids, without my heart being in it, surely the kids will suffer. Wouldn't it be better for them to be with friends, that really relish spending time with these kids? Thus, being inspired by a heart connection must be our compass and anchor in our search for discovering how we are to personally contribute to the world.

### Three Kinds of Contributions: Intellectual, Emotional & Physical

The beginning of our Parasha repeats the word תְּרוּמָה/terumah – “contribution or offering” thrice:

סֹפֵר שְׁמוֹת פְּרָקָה כֹּה פֶּסוּק ב... וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבָבוֹ תִּקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַתִּי:  
פֶּסוּק ג וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֵתֶם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנַחֲשָׁת:

“Take (for) Me an offering...” “...you shall take My offering,” and again repeats, “And this is the offering that you shall take” (*Shemot* 25:2-3).

Rashi explains that each of the three repetitions of the word תְּרוּמָה/terumah refers to a different kind of offering:

1. The offering of the half-shekel per head from which they made the sockets of the Mishkan (*Shemot* 38:26, 27)
2. The half-shekel donation for the community funds, from which they purchased the communal sacrifices (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim* 1:1; *Megillah* 29b).
3. The thirteen materials required for the work of the Mishkan or for the garments of the kohanim (*Shemot* Chapter 25).

These three kinds of offerings correspond respectively to the three pillars of the world: Intellectual/Spiritual, Emotional and Physical. Just as the Israelites donated to all three kinds of offerings, so too, does every person today need to contribute their gift in every realm: intellectual, emotional and physical. Yet, the balanced blend between them varies from person to person. This balance may also change at different periods in our lives. Yet, regardless of our personal preference and circumstance, we all need to support – at least to some degree – each of the following three pillars that keep the world going:

מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת אֲבוֹת פְּרָק א מִשְׁנֵה ב עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים:

“The world stands upon three things - upon Torah, upon divine service, and upon acts of kindness” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:2).

1. וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה – “Take (for) Me an offering” refers to the intellectual pillar of the Torah. When we learn Torah, we take “Me” – G-d Himself, as Torah and G-d are completely one. Since the basis and foundation of Judaism is rooted in the Torah, this corresponds to the sockets which are the foundation of the *Mishkan*’s structure. Just as the sockets upheld the walls of the *Mishkan*, the Torah upholds all of Jewish life.

2. תִּקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַתִּי – “Take My Offering” refers to the emotional pillar of עֲבוֹדָה/Avoda – service to G-d. This corresponds to the communal sacrifices. Today, prayer is considered the main service of the Eternal, as it was instituted in place of the communal sacrifices (*Babylonian Talmud, Talmud, Berachot* 26b). The word תְּרוּמַתִּי/terumati is a composite word meaning, “My offering.” This signifies that when we pray, we become united with G-d.

3. וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ – “This is the offering that you shall take” describes the pillar of performing the mitzvot within the physical realm. The purpose of *mitzvot* is to transform physicality itself into holiness. This corresponds to the physical materials used to build the sanctuary for G-d. This kind of offering involves taking all sorts of physical substances and using them for a Divine purpose. In reference to this offering, the Torah does not mention G-d. Although when we perform a mitzvot, our connection to G-d is not always apparent, through the mitzvot we still fulfill Hashem’s ultimate intention for the universe.

<http://www.neirot.com/parshah/in-depth-sicha/parshas-terumah-three-gifts-three-pillars-2>

<p>וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה          “And this is the offering          that you shall take”</p>	<p>אֶת תְּרוּמָתִי          “...you shall take          My offering,”</p>	<p>וְיָקַח לִי תְרוּמָה          “Take (for) Me          an offering...”</p>
<p>גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים          Acts of Kindness</p>	<p>הַעֲבוּדָה          The Service</p>	<p>הַתּוֹרָה          The Torah</p>
<p>Physical</p>	<p>Emotional</p>	<p>Intellectual/Spiritual</p>
<p>The materials required for          the work of the Mishkan</p>	<p>The communal sacrifices</p>	<p>The Sockets of the Mishkan</p>

**Practical Steps to Find Our Personal Mission**

I recently read [an article by Sara Yoheved Rigler](#) that helped me stop feeling guilty about not finishing the book of *Tehillim*, cooking daily meals for mothers, hosting 30 strangers Friday night or picking up visitors from the airport etc. Although we all need to be engaged in Torah, prayer, and mitzvot in the physical realm, every soul is charged with a unique purpose, and each of our hearts connects with some ways of serving Hashem more than others. Once we become clear about our individual mission, we can dissolve the feeling of guilt over not being involved in all the other worthy endeavors.

So how do we discover our personal mission? Based on Rabbi Nivin, Sara Yoheved lists the following two questions to ask ourselves and write down the answers we get:

1. What were the five or ten most pleasurable moments in my life?
2. If I inherited a billion dollars and had six hours a day of discretionary time, what would I do with the time and money?

The answers we get to these questions will give us a clue to who we are and what makes us tick. Since Hashem wants our hearts, the times in our lives when our hearts are happiest indicate that we are fulfilling our personal purpose. Similar to Sara Yoheved’s personal discoveries, this exercise revealed that my personal mission is to continue teaching and writing. These endeavors should not detract from fulfilling the responsibilities in the physical realm such as the mitzvah of cooking for the family and preparing for Shabbat. As long as I have discharged my material mitzvot, I will continue to spin my ‘word-strands’ hoping and praying that they will be weaved into the spiritual curtains of the Temple together with all the other holy strands of sisterhood.