

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Terumah

What is the Inherent Connection between Giving Wholeheartedly and Encountering G-d?

What is the Importance of Offering Others the Opportunity to Give?

The question came up, “When are the happiest times of your life?” The answer of most people may be similar to mine. I always feel happiest when imparting meaningful creations to others. Whether I’m using my skills and creativity to write insightful teachings to share with the world, or whether I’m feeding my youngest granddaughter homemade applesauce from the apple tree growing in our backyard, or when teaching my students new ideas in the Torah. We feel the greatest feeling of fulfillment in life when we are contributing to others. I always resonated with the teaching that “more than the householder does for the poor, the poor person does for the householder...” (*Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8). From here we learn the importance of receiving because that way we are allowing others to give. The Hebrew word וְנָתְנוּ/venatnu – “they shall give” is a palindrome that reads the same forward and backward. This teaches us that the greatest gift we can give others is the opportunity to give. Thus, I encourage my students to feel comfortable receiving Shabbat invitations. As a teenager, I chose to go to The Free Gymnasium, a high school where the students help run the school. Now I allow my students to express their talents and abilities to actively contribute to the running of our midrasha. Students with Jewish day school backgrounds help tutor beginners, and others help garden and upkeep the campus, others again clean, paint, and decorate. I even have a student helping in the administration. Instead of hiring a cook as in most seminaries, all our students take turns cooking wholesome meals for the group. They really enjoy implying their creativity in preparing beautiful well-received meals. I also periodically encourage students to research and present their own deep creations. Their insightful and creative presentations always take away my breath, while they learn the most by giving over to others. Many women have a hard time receiving since it is more natural for us to give, give, and give... cooking, cleaning, breastfeeding, taking care of children, volunteering in the community...” Therefore, I try to encourage myself and the women I treat in EmunaHealing to learn to be receivers as well as givers. This is so much easier when we realize how receiving actually is giving. I recall about 43 years ago when we were new in the Yeshiva, how my husband and I as a newlywed couple, learning Torah full-time were encouraged to ask our parents for financial assistance. It broke our pride in being independent to turn to our parents for money. However, realizing that allowing them to support our Torah learning in Israel was a tremendous *zechut* (merit) for them, we mustered up the courage to ask for help, knowing that this would bring our parents eternal blessings.

What is Hashem’s Greatest Gift to Us?

In the description of the mitzvah to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) it says, “They shall take...” rather than “They shall give” as would have been expected.

ספר שמות פרק כה פסוק ב

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לִבּוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַתִּי:

“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).

This confirms the concept that through giving we receive (take). All this is alluded to in the midrash that pointed out that the Torah did not merely write וְיָקְחוּ תְרוּמָה/vayikchu Teruma – ‘take an offering’

but **וְיִקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה** /*vayikchu li Teruma* – ‘take for Me an offering.’ The word **לִי** /*li* – ‘for Me’ may be understood as **אֹתִי** /*oti* – ‘Me’ as if the Torah meant: “You will take Me [G-d] so-to-speak as an offering.” That is “Take Me to dwell among you” (*Rabbeinu Bachaya, Shemot 25:2* based on *Midrash Tanchuma 24, Emor*). By donating to the building of the Mishkan, the Israelites got – so-to-speak – to take Hashem and receive a closeness to Him as never before. This offering must be given by everyone “whose heart moves them to give.” Until then, the Israelites had been recipients of Hashem’s miracles and deliverances. He had taken them from slavery to freedom and continuously performed wonders for them. The only thing G-d had not yet done was to give the Israelites the chance of giving something back to Him. Hashem’s greatest gift to us is the ability to give to Him. G-d allowed the Israelites to give something back to Him, by building Him a home for His spirit to rest among us. A people that only received but could not give was trapped in dependency and lack of self-respect. Hashem allowed the Israelites to come close to Him, and He to them, by giving them the chance to give (Based on Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Labour of Gratitude*, Adar I 2 5782).

The Mishkan – Rectification for the Spiritual Lack Behind the Sin of the Golden Calf

G-d creates the remedy before the wound (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 13b*). Hashem gave the Israelites the opportunity to give of themselves and express their creativity to build for Him a home, to rectify their making of the Golden Calf. “The Torah is not written in chronological order.” The episode of the Golden Calf took place long before the mitzvah to construct the Mishkan. For on the seventeenth of Tamuz, the tablets were broken, and on Yom Kippur, Hashem became reconciled with Israel. On the morrow [i.e., on the eleventh of Tishri], they began donating for the Mishkan, and it [the Mishkan] was erected on the first of Nissan [*Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 31*]; (Rashi, *Shemot 31:18*). The Torah hid *Parashat Ki Tisa* describing the sin of the Golden calf, by sandwiching it between two Parshiot about the Mishkan before it (*Teruma, Tetzaveh*) and two following it (*Vayakhel, Pekudei*), to atone of the children of Israel. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out that the mitzvah to build the Mishkan in *Parashat Teruma* is written before the sin of the Golden Calf to tell us that the cure existed before the disease, the mending before the fracture, the rectification before the sin. We made a Calf not to worship it as an idol, but because we need a symbol of Hashem’s Presence to feel close to. We need to sense the imminence of Hashem in our midst, not just the transcendent G-d far away ‘in the sky’ or at the summit of the mountain. Even if no one can see Hashem’s face, we need at least to see some visible sign of His glory. Therefore, the building of the Mishkan is not only an atonement for sin but a rectification of the spiritual lack that caused the construction of the Golden Calf (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Labour of Gratitude*, Adar I 2 5782).

Encountering G-d Through the Gratitude of Giving

סֵפֶר שְׁמוֹת פֶּרֶק כֹּה פְּסוּקֵהוּ וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם:

“Let them build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell in them” (*Shemot 25:8*).

This is the first time that the root shin-chaf-nun – referring to Hashem’s Indwelling Presence – appears in the Torah. Never before had it been used in connection with G-d, yet eventually the verb sh-ch-n – ‘to dwell’ became a keyword of Judaism itself. From it came the word Mishkan meaning a sanctuary, and Shechinah, the Divine Feminine Indwelling Presence, which is the talk of the town here in Bat Ayin. G-d doesn’t tell us, ‘I will dwell within it’ (the Mishkan), but rather, “I will dwell within them.” When we give of ourselves wholeheartedly, we open ourselves to receive Hashem’s

presence within us. Hashem doesn't live in buildings. He lives in Builders. He doesn't live in structures of stone but in the human heart. The etymology of the word Teruma hints at this. It doesn't refer to simply a contribution, but literally to being 'raised up.' When we give, it is not just our contribution but we who are raised up and elevated by the Divine Presence dwelling within us. I often ask myself how do you feel the presence of G-d amid everyday life? That is the life-transforming secret of the word 'Teruma.' It means 'a contribution.' Hashem told Moshe, "Take Me as a contribution for everyone whose heart prompts them to give" (*Shemot* 25:2). The best way of encountering G-d is to give. The very act of giving flows from, or leads to, the understanding that what we give is part of what we were given. I, personally, experience this concept the strongest through my desire to give to my children. I want to impart to my children just like my parents gave to me, and their parents gave to them back to the very first parent in the world - Hashem. When we give, it is a way of giving thanks, an act of gratitude, to those who gave to us, which is ultimately Hashem. He created the universe. He made us. He gave us life. The Torah therefore tells us something simple and practical. Give, and you will come to see life as a gift. You don't need to be able to prove the existence of G-d. All you need is to be thankful that you exist - and the rest will follow. That is how Hashem came to be close to the Israelites through the building of the sanctuary because it was built by the gifts of "everyone whose heart prompts them to give" (*Shemot* 25:2). Where people give voluntarily to one another and to holy causes, that is where the Divine Presence rests. G-d doesn't live in the glorious Temple. He lives in the hearts of those who give. G-d's Presence implies that what we have is His (Rabbi Yonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation, The Gift Of Giving, Terumah, 5776, 5783*)

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Teruma- Some Tips for How to Allow Others to Give by Receiving

Most of us love giving to others, but many people have a hard time appreciating themselves enough to receive and accept gifts. Receiving is just as important as giving because, without receivers, there are no givers. People may want to give but they do not know to whom. So, don't be embarrassed to ask for help.

- **Receiving Through Giving** - Most of us don't typically give for the sake of receiving, but certain elements of giving gifts do automatically give back: the personal satisfaction of doing something for someone else and the sense of connection you feel with the person who receives your gift...all the more so if that person offers thanks to you in a meaningful way. Just as it makes you happy to give, let others have the pleasure of giving to YOU, and allowing them to feel the happiness it is to give. Receive gifts and kind words with a grateful heart, knowing the joy the other person is feeling by being able to give to you, just as you feel joyful when you can give to them or others. It's a blessing and joy to give - So let others have that too by allowing yourself to be a joyful receiver!
- **Is Receiving Etiquette a Thing of the Past?** - My parents put a lot of effort into teaching us how to receive with gratitude. Gifts from grandparents and aunts/uncles prompted the writing of thank-you cards. In our younger years, Mother wrote the card, and we signed it or added a drawing. As we got older, we learned to write and illustrate our own thank-you letters. We added the stamp, and the sticker saying "by airmail only" if it was a letter to our grandparents living in Israel. Times have greatly changed from when I was a child. Life has gotten more hectic. However, it seems that for many, not only have handwritten notes become a thing of the

past but so has the basic gesture of saying “thank you” at all. We often wonder if the people to whom we send gifts ever got them.

- **Thoughtful Thank You’s** – It seems logical that the full circle of giving can only be completed by the gracious and thoughtful act of receiving. How do you acknowledge gifts? Do you send a handwritten thank-you note? An email? A text? Or do you make a phone call? Perhaps now is a good time to slow down and give more thought to saying “thank you” to the gift-givers in your life.
- **Take a Picture of the Gift Recipient Opening the Gift** –Then send it with a thank-you card or as an email attachment.
- **Share Your Creation with the Giver** – If the gift you received lends itself to creative creations, take a photo of what you made, or gift them with one of your creations. You can also take a picture of how you are putting the gift to use. If you got a new necklace, send them a photo wearing it with a matching dress. It will really brighten their day.
- **Call the Sender on the Phone** – to give a sincere and heartfelt “thank you” in a personal manner. Or Initiate a Facetime or Zoom call with gift-givers so they get to see your gratitude or excitement – live!
- **Considering the Temperament and Specific Emotional Needs of the Giver** – Each person in your life is different. Ponder how you can show your appreciation in ways that are most meaningful to them, based on their personality. One kind of personality will appreciate your attention, affection, approval, and acceptance. Another gift giver who may have put noticeable time and energy into your gift will appreciate your expressing appreciation for their work and the time they spent on you. The personality who is sensitive to rejection needs to know you value them much more than the gift. Even if you don’t like the gift, thank them sincerely for their affection and let them know you truly value their friendship and their steadfast presence in your life. When you devote some time to understanding each giver’s temperament you can become the best gift recipient ever!