

**Last week, in Parshat Mishpatim, we received a myriad of laws dealing with the relationship between man and man. The sequence in the Torah is interrupted to allow for these laws to directly follow the revelation at Mount Sinai. Hashem shows us the importance of our societal obligations by inserting them first in the Torah, before explaining to us our obligations to the Divine. It would be incomprehensible for a person to even contemplate coming close to God when they take actions to separate themselves from their community and people. In this week's Parsha, Hashem instructs us to build a sanctuary for the Divine Presence so that we may have a constant reminder of the revelation at Sinai. Parshat Terumah discusses in painstaking detail every aspect of the construction of the Mishkan as well as the clothing of the Kohanim. But before the construction could begin, the Jews needed to deal with one problem- where would they get all of the materials they needed? Perhaps like the manna, God would simply deposit the materials on the ground and the Jews would begin to build. This, however, was not to be. Hashem is very clear in the Torah that such a project would need to be funded in a different way.**

**In the opening Pesukim of Parshat Terumah, Hashem specifies that the materials for the Mishkan should come from the generosity of the Jewish people. As the Mishkan was such an important part of our development as a nation, its construction should come from the group as a whole. For this reason, regardless of a person's means, every single Jew was required to contribute at least a small amount (a half shekel). Additionally, Hashem told Moshe that anyone who is generous of heart should give more. The Mishkan would be a physical manifestation of the Jewish people's commitment to God and His service, and that commitment was not dependent on how wealthy a person was. Certainly this teaches us that when we as a nation have the opportunity to contribute to projects which raise awareness of service of God, we all have the obligation to pitch in.**

**This lesson should have been a very easy one to convey- when Hashem directly asks you to give, you give!**

**However, if one pays close attention to the text of the opening Pesukim, one will see that Hashem never actually asks us to give. Rather, Hashem says 'Take for me an offering'. How strange! When someone is soliciting funds, they don't usually phrase it as 'take' a donation- we want people to give! What is the Torah telling us with this peculiar phrasing?**

**I think Hashem is teaching us an important lesson about material wealth and charity. We all want to be seen as, and see ourselves as givers rather than takers. We have a desire to give to those less fortunate than ourselves. And we all like the feeling we get when we are able to help someone out. But I think Hashem is trying to tell us that this is not the reason we give. Ultimately, every single one of us is a taker. We take from God. One of our purposes in this world is to enjoy all that Hashem has provided for us. We are supposed to take from Him. Hashem explicitly says 'Take for Me'. However, that realization comes with a cost. We have to understand that our material wealth comes directly from God, and therefore is not really ours to begin with. We cannot ignore the part of the Pasuk which says 'For ME'. Hashem wants us to take from Him, but we need to do it for Him. We need to use that which we take from God to better the world. Whether we use it to spread the words of Torah and religious observance, or for giving charity to the poor, it is our job to take from what we were given and use it in God's name. Through this, we become a united community of people who are generous of heart, who understand that we give to others, only because we ourselves are actually takers.**

**Shabbat Shalom,**

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