

Spotlight on....Giving and Taking

Background:

Parashat Terumah contains Hashem's instructions to Moshe for how the Israelites should build the mishkan (or the tabernacle). The parsha opens in Chapter 25:

<p>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.</p>	<p>וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבָבוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת-תְּרוּמָתִי:</p>
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If you read the English, this pasuk doesn't seem unusual. But that's because the translators translated it in a way to make sure that it would make sense! If we translate the pasuk literally, it should say "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Tell the Israelite people to **take** for Me gifts; you shall take gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves them."

The wording of this pasuk is surprising! Hashem is commanding the people to give, but Hashem doesn't use the word "give" - instead, Hashem uses the word "take." What does it mean to take a gift for someone else??

Let's look at three possible explanations:

Ibn Ezra: The word "ויקחו" or "take" is used because it implies a missing step that wasn't articulated in the text - each person should take from their property, and then give it to Hashem.

Seforno: Hashem actually commanded Moshe to appoint collectors who would go around and collect the donations from each person. This is what "ויקחו" or "take" refers to because that was the original instruction. However, in reality the Israelites were so excited to give their gifts that they rushed straight to Moshe to give before the collectors even reached them.

Ketav v'haKabalah: When an important person accepts something from a "regular" person, technically the regular person is giving something to the important person. However, because giving something to an important person is a big honor, by providing the regular person the opportunity to give something to the important person, the important person has actually flipped the exchange! Now the regular person is the "taker," and the important person the "giver," because the important person has given the regular person the opportunity for an honor, and the regular person is accepting the honor. That is why the word "ויקחו" is used - because the Israelites were accepting the honor from Hashem to give Hashem gifts.

Questions:

1. How do each of these three opinions affect our understanding of how the Israelites gave gifts to build the mishkan?
2. Do you like any of these opinions more than others?
3. Have you ever had an opportunity to give to someone or something that made you identify with the Ketav v'haKabalah's interpretation?