

# Terumah

Source Sheet by Rabbi Amy Bernstein

## Exodus 25:1-8

(1) יהוה spoke to Moses, saying: (2) Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart is so moved. (3) And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper; (4) blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair; (5) tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood; (6) oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; (7) lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. (8) And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

## שמות כ"ה:א'-ח'

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ־לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת־תְּרוּמַתִּי: (ג) וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנִחְשֵׁת: (ד) וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: (ה) וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעִצֵּי שִׁטִּים: (ו) שֹׁמֶן לַמָּאֵר בְּשֵׁמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים: (ז) אֲבָנֵי־שֵׁהָם וְאַבְנֵי מַלְאִים לְאַפֵּד וְלְחֹשֶׁן: (ח) וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכָם:

**Rabbi Pamela Wax** (from; Weekly Torah Study Through a Tikkun Middot and Mussar Lens, IJS)

In parsing 25:2, Rashi tries to understand why that word-li, for Me-is necessary. Why not just say, "Speak to the children of Israel that they take t'rumah ? Rashi says that here means 'rich- lishmi, solely for My sake. In other words, the word indicates the importance of the contribution as an act that is serving God whole-heartedly. If there is any self-regard or self-gratification in the act of giving, then it can't possibly be solely for God's sake.

According to the teaching of Reb Chaim Shmulevitz,

"Chazal have described each and every person as a miniature Mishkan, wherein the Divine Presence dwells. The focus of the Mishkan was the Torah, embodied in the ark containing the tablets. The housing for this ark was a Mishkan erected upon the twin pillars of lishmah, purity of motive, and nedivat halev, generosity of heart. A person can make himself into a Mishkan when his essence is Torah and the cornerstones of his deeds are purity of motive and generosity of heart." [1]

The purity of motive is therefore an essential aspect of the generosity that is being required of the Israelites. Like my benefactor in the Mussar study group, their act of generosity had to be free of ego involvement for it to be a divinely-inspired act of generosity. This is a difficult (near impossible?) level of generosity to cultivate. Yet we probably all have a couple of very vivid examples of either being the giver or the receiver of that kind of unmitigated generosity. How do we achieve it without involving or activating our own ego nescis, our own sense of self-satisfaction and pride when we are generous, our own need for recognition and gratitude from the receiver, or our own sense of scarcity?

**Rabbi Shefa Gold** (From Torah Journeys)

AS ARTISTS OF THE HOLY we are given the spiritual challenge of opening to the creative flow and becoming a clear channel for Divine Will. To prepare for this purpose, we must heal our hearts that have contracted in stinginess born of fear. Terumah means "gift," and ultimately the only gift we can give is ourselves, our full and available presence in each and every moment of our lives.

GIVING EVERYTHING MEANS ACCEPTING this moment, making myself completely available for the experience of being human - all of it, the torturous grief and jubilant triumph. It means not hiding or shrinking away from the experience of this "Now." It is, after all, a two-way invitation that is being offered. I am making a home for God to dwell within me, and I am listening for God's invitation to come home, which is to know this world as God's house and to enter into it completely. With this gift of my presence, my wholeheartedness, I build the Mishkan. How else can I become a servant of the One?

**Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg** (from Torah, Mindfulness, and Social Justice - IJS weekly Torah commentary)

When God instructs Moses to collect gifts from the Israelites for the building of the mishkan (the movable sanctuary in the wilderness,) the word used for the gifts is "terumah," which comes from the verb, "to lift up." The purpose of this sanctuary is to create a dwelling place for Divinity among the Israelites. On an individual level, the act of giving, when it is done with awareness, can lift us up on an internal level and create a home inside of us for Divinity. The act of giving expands the capacity within us to bring Divinity out into the world. The Chasidic master, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, teaches on these verses;

"We are all obliged to serve the Creator in action and in thought. By means of our intention and holy thought we raise up the Shekhinah from the dust. Our deeds are so

that we will raise ourselves up, to become better people.

This is how we can interpret our verse. "Every person whose hearts so moves him" (*asher yidvenu libbo*)-this refers to thought, by which "you shall take up My elevation" (*tikchu et terumati*), that is, the Shekinah will be raised up and exalted (*vitromem*). "These are the gifts that you shall accept from them" (*haterumah asher tikchu mei- itam*) this is the inner elevation that we take for ourselves, which comes about through action. That is the sense of "gold, silver, and copper," which signify sacred devotion."

In light of our parasha and Levi Yitzhak's commentary, we can see the curiosity, generosity and cheerfulness as *terumot*, as qualities (to be) lifted up within (the self), first as thoughts, and then as gifts of action towards (others).

According to the Zohar, the gold, silver and copper gifts in our parasha represent the three sefirot of gevurah, chesed and tiferet, or boundaries/judgment, love and beauty/balance. When awareness is present, our actions can serve as conduits for these pure qualities to manifest in the world.

### **Rabbi Josh Feigelson**

...the Hebrew term *nadiv*. This word suggests not so much the office or status of a noble, but rather the characteristic of nobility. It is linked to the term for generosity: *nedavah* (a of nobility is bound up with what noble people do: they're generous. It is not about station, but about behavior and character.

"Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give," *kol ish asher yidvenu-libo*. After Revelation, God creates the possibility for every Israelite to be generous through the joint project of building the Mishkan. Everyone can give. And in giving, everyone can be a person who gives-a *nadiv*, a noble.

There's an important message here about collective belonging, one that can inform all of our group experiences. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes in his book *The Home We Build Together*, "A nation is built by building." So are communities, companies, congregations, sports teams, and families. But there's also an important message about the Exodus: the culmination of the Exodus is not the crossing of the sea, and not even the revelation of the Torah. The culmination of the Exodus is in the building of the Mishkan, in the empowerment of the powerless to be noble, to be generous, to contribute.

**Eitan Fishbane** (from "Terumah - The Gift That Elevates "- jtsa.edu)

As much as evolutionary biologists teach us that we are wired for self-survival and self-protection, that we have evolved as humans to look out for "number one" (and who can deny that selfishness is a powerful obstacle that we all struggle with?), there is a growing realization among scientists and psychologists that we are also deeply "wired to connect in relationship to others. Our bodies and our minds are more healthy and fulfilled when we find ourselves in loving relationships, when we give of ourselves to the other with an open heart, with a heart made pure (see Mona Dekoven Fishbane. *Loving with the Brain in Mind Neurobiology and Couple Therapy* [New York: WW Norton, 2013], 59-63). When we are at our best, we give not in order to receive we give in the way that the Hasidic masters speak of the ultimate service to God, the act of *mesirut nefesh*-the giving of one's whole soul to divinity in the moment of worship, and in the fulfillment of the mitzvot. As Martin Buber taught, the self in relation to other persons, and in relation to the world at large, reaches through these encounters toward the ultimate relation with divinity:

*"Extended, the lines of relationship intersect in the eternal You  
 ct of  
 Every single You is a glimpse of that.  
 Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You."*

The act of *mesirut nefesh*, several Hasidic mystics teach us, is a process of transcending the prison of our own egotism and self-centeredness; in the moment of devotion, in our deepest prayer, we seek to break open the self-protective walls of our hearts, to make ourselves truly vulnerable to the indwelling of the divine presence. And, as Buber expressed the matter, we encounter the eternal divine You through the mystery and wonder of our human relationships. In opening our hearts to others with generosity and vulnerability, we come to stand in the radiant and transformative presence of God - the divinity that dwells *within*, not just *beyond* the human.

