

Shabbat Morning Drash
Rabbi Warner Ferratier
Congregation Beth Emeth, February 5, 2022

Several months ago, in mid-November, I got a call from my brother-in-law. We're close, but not the type of close where we frequently call each other, so of course I answered immediately. Worried that something was wrong, I asked cautiously "is everything all right?"

I was incredibly relieved when he responded cheerfully. "Yes. I was just wondering if you had gotten mom anything for Hanukkah yet?"

With Hanukkah less than 2 weeks away, I was a little embarrassed to admit that I hadn't even started thinking about it yet. He said, well, I know exactly what to get her. We've been to this antique shop twice, and each time, she's looked at a particular antique purse. I know she would never buy it for herself, and it's too expensive for your sister and me to get for her, but I was wondering if maybe we could all go in on it together?

Since I find gift-giving to be extremely stressful, I was more than happy to agree. Through one thing and another, we didn't get the chance to give it to her until the week before last. I wish you could have seen her face when she opened it. She was completely surprised, and so happy that she even posted about it on Facebook.

I am extremely grateful to my brother-in-law for being able to think of it. He has many talents, and one of them is gift giving. When you get a gift from him, you know that he has put a lot of thought into it, and you know that you're going to love it even before you open it.

Unfortunately, not everyone has his talent for gift-giving. It's one of the reasons why we ask people to give us their wish-lists. It's why our friends create wedding and baby registries, and why we often end up just taking our friend out for dinner or drinks. It's much easier when we know what the person wants.

Thus, G-d is doing the Children of Israel a favor when God says in one of the first verses in this week's portion "Diber el b'nei Yisrael v'hitchu li terumah," Which is often translated as "Tell the Children of Israel to bring me gifts."

At first glance, it might seem unusual, or maybe even a little rude for God to be saying the Israelites "bring me presents," but if we look at it a little deeper, it kind of makes sense. The people are just getting to know God. They haven't yet learned how to interact, or gotten any sense of what is pleasing to God. By being explicit, God is giving the people a way to show their love, awe, and respect.

What all of this reminds me of is a book that was once recommended to me called *The Five Love Languages*. The central idea of the book is that there are 5 different ways of showing or receiving love, and that for our most important relationships to be successful, we both have to understand how the important people in our lives show that they love us, but we also have to understand how they want to receive it. Briefly, there those five methods are:

Words of Affirmation-saying that we love someone, or needing to hear it

Acts of service- doing nice things for those we love, or letting them do nice things for us

Quality time- explicitly devoting time, or recognizing the time others make for us

Physical affection- showing through affectionate touch, or allowing others to touch us

Gift giving- giving special gifts, or accepting gifts graciously and sincerely

According to the book, each of us have specific preferences, and if others don't express their love in the way we prefer, it can be difficult to recognize that they are in fact showing us love. At the same time, if we don't show our own love in the way that others prefer, they may not be able to appreciate our love as we would like them to.

Given the nature of this Torah portion, and the emphasis on gifts, it might seem as though God prefers that we show our love to God through gifts. While that may in fact be the theme of this parasha, in reality, God makes it possible for us to show our love through all five methods.

When we use the words of our liturgy in prayer, we express our love for God. In fact, the word love comes up in several of them, especially in Ahavat Olam, the Shema/V'ahavta, and Ahava Raba. In fact, several of these prayers speak of our love for God and God's love for us.

When we perform acts of Gemilut Chasadim and Tikkun Olam we show our love for God through acts of service. Even the act of prayer is sometimes called Avodat HaLev, service of the heart. When we read in the Torah we see the acts of service God has performed for us, and some of us might even have personal experiences where we have felt God acting in our lives.

When we take the time offered to us on Shabbat and our various holidays, using them to attend services and to spend time with our families, we share quality time with God. When we recognize these special days as times God has made for us, then we can feel as God making time for us.

Physical touch is a little more difficult. However, I would argue that when we perform the physical choreography of prayer, or wear our head coverings, tallit, and tefillin, we are demonstrating physical acts of love. When we appreciate the very physicality of our bodies, we can experience God's love.

Finally, although we may not be giving the specific gifts that God asked for in the parasha, when we give Tzedakah, we give gifts to God, and thereby show our love. Our sources explicitly tell us that Shabbat is a gift. That God has made us in God's own image, and in so doing, has expressed God's love.

In any healthy relationship, whether with God, or with another person, at the very least we want to be appreciated, and we have the responsibility to show our appreciation. Ideally, we want to express our own love and feel loved in return. This parasha gives us a model for how to do so. May we always be sensitive and appreciative of the love that is shown to us, and may we always be able to express love in ways that will be appreciated by others. In doing so, may we also demonstrate our love for God, and be blessed to feel God's love in return.