



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה Terumah

February 25th, 2025

By Rabbi Avi Cohen

Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

תשפ"ה Terumah

The Mishkan (Tabernacle) - the portable sanctuary that accompanied the Jewish people during their 40-year trek in the wilderness - was built with the donations of the Jewish people who donated all of the necessary building materials.

The Torah tells us (Exodus 24:2):

(ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה

Speak to the Children of Israel that they should take a donation for Me.

The Sages wonder about the words “take a donation.” Should it not say, “give me a donation?”

The Midrash teaches us.

מדרש רבה ויקרא - פרשה לד פסקה ח

תני ר' יהושע יותר ממה שבעל הבית עושה עם העני העני עושה עם בעל הבית

The poor man who has received a donation does more for his benefactor than the benefactor does for him.

How is that? While the poor man receives a sizable amount of money with which he can support himself and his family, the donor receives eternal reward in the World to Come.

The Talmud tells us: שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא *all the wealth in the entire world would not suffice to pay the reward for even the smallest mitzvah.* The reward in the World to Come is so great that it dwarfs even all the wealth in this world. Charity is a *big* mitzvah because it enables the poor person to live and serve Hashem and to sustain his family who also serve Hashem. Because the benefactor has made it possible for the poor man to serve Hashem, he gets a portion of every mitzvah the person does. His gift keeps giving and giving, and he keeps taking and taking.

The same concept applies to one who gives money to a Yeshiva where Torah is taught and learned.

Another answer is that whenever we give charity, although we give money away, what we receive in return actually exceeds what we have dispensed. How is that?

The Talmud (Tractate Taanit 9a) quotes Rabbi Yochanan's lesson derived from the verse in Deuteronomy (14:22).

עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֶׂר אֶת כָּל תְּבוּאֹת זֵרַעְךָ הַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה

22) *You shall surely tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year.*

When expressing the instructions to tithe, the Torah doubles the verb "tithe" - עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֶׂר. Addressing this anomaly, Rabbi Yochanan points out that the second word can also be read to mean "become rich." Rabbi Yochanan therefore taught:

ואמר רבי יוחנן: מאי דכתיב עשר תעשר? עשר בשביל שתתעשר

"The Torah is teaching us that one should give his tenth in order to become rich."

The Talmud continues with the following story:

אשכחיה רבי יוחנן לינוקא דריש לקיש. אמר ליה, אימא לי פסוקיך. אמר ליה, עשר תעשר. אמר ליה, ומאי עשר תעשר? אמר ליה, עשר בשביל שתתעשר! אמר ליה, מנא לך? אמר ליה, זיל נסי! אמר ליה, ומי שרי לנסוייה להקדוש ברוך הוא? והכתיב לא תנסו את ה'. אמר ליה, הכי אמר רבי הושעיא חוץ מזו, שנאמר הִבִּיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וְיִהְיֶה טָרֵף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֲנוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת, אָמַר יְדוּד צְבָאוֹת, אִם לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרָכָה עַד בְּלִי דִּי!

Rabbi Yochanan met Reish Lakish's son and after hearing the same lesson from him asked him: "Who says?" The kid answered, "Go try it!" Rabbi Yochanan then asked him, "Is one permitted to test Hashem? There is an explicit verse prohibiting it!" The boy

*responded with a quote from Rabbi Hoshea who said, "Charity is an exception, based on the verse in Malachi (3:10) which says: "Bring all the tithes into the storage house, and let it be sustenance in My Temple. **Test Me, if you will, with this,** says Hashem, Master of Legions, see if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end."*

So, if, for giving charity, Hashem promises us "blessing without end," one who gives charity will actually receive much more than he gave. This is why it says "take a donation" because in the end you will take much more than you give.

A third explanation as to why the Torah said "take a donation" is that when giving money to charity we actually "take for ourselves" the very money that we have donated. Sounds like "eating your cake and having it too!" something we've been told is impossible! How can that be?

The answer is that we are talking about taking it with us when we leave this world. When one dies, all of his material possessions are left behind, as he cannot take them with him. The only possessions that we can take with us to the next world are the Torah that we've learned and mitzvot that we have performed. Thus, the only money that one can really take with him is the money that he gave to charity. In this case, the *smaller* his remaining bank account (because of charitable gifts), the *wealthier* he is! His donated money has been transformed into a spiritual mitzvah and has been deposited into his bank account in the world to come where it is waiting for him.

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen Kagan, d. 1933) gave the following parable:

A man was summoned to the king with very serious charges levelled against him. He went to his best friend whom he spent most of his time with and asked him to accompany him to the king and testify on his behalf. His friend flatly refused and told him he could not come. He went next to his lesser friend and asked him to accompany him to the king. This friend told him, "I will accompany you up to the gates of the king's palace, but, more than that, I cannot do." In desperation, he went to a third person that wasn't so close to him but maybe would be able to help. This friend replied, "Sure! I will go with you to the king! I will plead your case and get you off the hook!" Sure enough, he went with him, testified on his behalf, and he received a favorable judgment from the king.

The Chofetz Chiam explains that we will all be summoned to the King of all Kings when we complete our mission on this earth. The first friend we will go to for help is our wealth and possessions, the things we were busy with most of our lives. But, necessarily remaining here, they can't accompany us to the king. The next place we go, is to our relatives, who tell us, "We will take you to the grave, but we cannot go any further than that." The last place we go to is to our Torah and Mitzvot, the things that perhaps we did not give too much importance to during our lives. They accompany and represent us to the king and successfully bring us a favorable judgment.

Rabbi Shamshon Wertheimer (1658-1724) was King Leopold of Austria's finance minister whom he entrusted with all of the kingdom's financial secrets. A certain bishop won the king's favor and could not bear to see Rav Shamshon, the Jew, in such a position of honor and trust. He tried everything he could to discredit Rav Shamshon in the king's eyes, but to no avail; the king held him to be an honest and trustworthy person.

The bishop once came to the king with the following proposition: “Your majesty, there is a Jew whom you have trusted with all the wealth of the kingdom. Do you know if he is faithful and honest? I will prove that he is making himself rich at the king’s expense. I bribed his bookkeeper, who gave me a copy of his books. I didn’t believe my eyes when I saw how much money he has. Let the king ask him how much he is worth and see what he answers. If his answer concurs with the number on the books, I will admit that he is an honest man and never bother you about him again. But if he states a sum less than what’s on the books, you will know immediately that he is a swindler, and you must send him to his immediate death.”

The king thought, “I have nothing to lose in this proposition. If he is honest, I get the bishop off my neck, and if he isn’t, I *want* him dead.”

The king agreed to the deal and had a fire prepared to immediately kill Rav Shamshon in case it would be needed. He instructed the guards at the fire: If a person should come and ask you in the king’s name, “Have you fulfilled the mission of the king?” you are to take that person, no matter who he is, and throw him directly into the fire without any questions.

After all was set, the king invited Rav Shamshon to his chambers for a consultation. The king led the conversation to Rav Shamshon’s personal welfare. “Do you receive suitable pay for your devoted service? About how much is your personal wealth my good friend?” the king asked very matter-of-factly.

“Does the king want to know the exact amount? That would be difficult to estimate on the spot.” Responded Rav Shamshon.

“I don’t mean to the exact gulden,” the king said, “Tell me how much you are sure you have.”

Rav Shamshon thought for a minute and then told the king a sum. The king could hardly restrain his astonishment. Rav Shamshon gave him a number which was roughly ten percent of the amount on the books. It looked as if the bishop was right. His finance minister had obviously succeeded in fooling him into thinking he was honest. With that, the king said to Rav Shamshon, "Rav Shamshon, I need you to go to a certain place (the fire) to ask the people there **if they have fulfilled the mission of the king.** Please go find out, and report back to me."

Rav Shamshon set out without a clue that he was on his way to his certain death. On the way to the fire, a Jew came up to him and said, "Rav Shamshon, aren't you a mohel?"

"Yes!" responded Rav Shamshon.

"I have an eight-day old baby boy who needs to have his Brit Milah today. I invited a mohel, but he is not feeling well and does not feel up to doing it. Everything is prepared and ready, could you please come and do it?"

"The king has sent me on an errand, how can I delay it?" asked Rav Shamshon.

"And I have a mission from the King of Kings, Hashem, which also must not be delayed!" responded the father.

Rav Shamshon could not disagree with his logic and went with him to perform the Brit Milah.

After the ceremony, a festive meal was served, and wine was drunk. As soon as Rav Shamshon drank a cup of wine, he felt a little dizzy, and lay down for a while and soon fell asleep. No one wanted to awaken the honored guest, and he slept for a few hours.

When Rav Shamshon woke up, it was too late to go to the fire, so he hurried home arriving after midnight and feeling bad that he had to defer the king's mission until morning.

In the meantime, the bishop heard that his plan had worked, and that Rav Shamshon was sent to the fire to his death. He could not contain his excitement, so he decided to go the fire himself; maybe he could still see some of the Jew's bones burning in the fire.

When the bishop arrived at the fire, he said to the guards. "I have come to see with my own eyes, **have you fulfilled the mission of the king?**"

"Aha! We have been waiting for you!" exclaimed the hangmen. With that, they grabbed the bishop and threw him right into the fire!

When Rav Shamshon arrived home that night, he found his house in an uproar. His family were all worried about him, because all his assets had been sealed by the king.

After praying Shacharit the next morning, Rav Shamshon hurried to the fire to complete his mission. He asked the hangmen. "Did you fulfill the mission of the king?"

"We sure did!" They answered. "We carried out our orders to the letter. You should have heard that bishop yelling and screaming: 'No! You have the wrong man!' but we obeyed the king's instructions and did not listen to a word he said. We threw him right in."

Rav Shamshon thanked them, and quickly ran back to the palace to report his findings to the king. When Rav Shamshon appeared before the king, the king looked at him as if he was looking at a ghost. After excusing his tardiness, Rav Shamshon reported to the king that his command had indeed been fulfilled, and that the bishop was thrown into the fire according to the king's orders. On the other hand, Rav Shamshon asked the king why all his property was confiscated.

The king suddenly broke out into uncontrollable laughter. He laughed so hard he could barely stand. He then embraced Rav Shamshon and held him close to his heart as he continued to laugh until tears came to his eyes. Rav Shamshon had no idea what was going on but waited patiently until the king came to himself.

Finally, after the king calmed down, he told Rav Shamshon the whole story of the bishop's accusation against him, and that the fire was really intended for him, and that Rav Shamshon had miraculously escaped certain death.

"I see from this that you are a righteous, G-dly man, and that your G-d has saved you from an unjustified death. But tell me, why did you lie to me when I asked you how much you were worth? You gave me a number roughly ten percent of what I knew you had!"

"G-d forbid!" exclaimed Rav Shamshon. "I would never lie to the king! When the king asked me how *much I am sure I have*, I could not state the amount on the books. That is not surely mine. I will prove it to you. Only yesterday I had that amount yet today I am penniless! In one split second, the king confiscated everything that I owned.

The only money I am sure I have is the money that I have given to charity. *That* can never be taken away from me. I am used to giving one tenth of my wealth to charity, and therefore, that is the amount I told the king. "

The king was extremely pleased with Rav Shamshon's explanation and then said. "There is no question of your integrity, and therefore I grant you your possessions back. But please tell me what I can do for you to repay you for the unpleasantness I have caused you."

“I don’t need anything for myself,” responded Rav Shamshon, “But the Jewish community in Vienna are in need of a larger synagogue where they can join together to pray.”

The king granted his wish, and the shul came to be known as “Rav Shamshon’s Shul.”

Harav Eliezer Menachem Man Shach זצ"ל (1899-2001) gives yet another explanation as to why regarding the mitzvah of charity, the Torah uses the word *take* instead of *give*.

With that which one gives money to the Mishkan, a clearly worthy recipient of his money, Hashem is giving him the opportunity to observe the mitzvah of charity to perfection. Only when one gives money to appropriate charities does Hashem give him the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of charity. If a person gives money where it is not needed, or to something that is not a holy cause, it is not the mitzvah of charity and he will receive no reward for it at all. How does one merit to give his money to a proper and worthy charity? By doing his homework and putting forth effort to determine what is worthy of his money. Only after a person has done his due diligence will Hashem bless his efforts and guide him to the correct and worthy places to give his money.

This concept is based on the Talmud in Tractate Sukkah 49b, which says:

שמא תאמר כל הבא לקפוץ קופץ? תלמוד לומר מה יקר חסדך אלקים.

Rabbi Elazar said: Maybe, you will think that anyone who wishes to give charity can do it? That is why the verse says, “How dear (rare) is your kindness, Hashem.”

What does the Talmud mean by this?

Rashi explains:

שמא כל הבא לקפוץ - ולעשות צדקה וחסד קופץ, ומספיקין וממציאין
לו אנשים מהוגנים לכך תלמוד לומר מה יקר צריך לתת לב ולטרוח ולרדף
אחריה, לפי שאינה מצויה תמיד לזכות בה למהוגנים

You may think that anyone who wishes to do acts of charity and kindness can do it, and Heaven will provide him with worthy people to give his charity to. That is why the verse says, "Charity is very dear and rare." One must pay close attention and toil to determine what is real charity and then run after it, because it's not so prevalent to find worthy recipients for one's charity.

This is how giving charity to the Mishkan is really *taking*. The donor is *receiving* the blessing of Hashem to enable him to give his charity to a worthy cause.

A student, passing his Rosh Yeshiva's (teacher's) house in Jerusalem, decided to stop in for a visit. He was shocked to find his teacher writhing in pain on the couch. "Rebbe, let me call an ambulance for you! You look like you are in so much pain!"

"No, it is not a physical ailment that I am suffering from; don't call an ambulance. There is nothing that they can do for me!" said his teacher.

"Then, what is it? What is causing you so much anguish and pain?" asked the student. The Rosh Yeshiva decided to relate to his student the source of his pain, thinking that maybe telling it to someone will help him deal with it.

"About five years ago, I received a phone call from the King David Hotel telling me that a certain guest, Mr. Mark Goldfinger, wanted to meet with me. Could I please bring my passport and come down to the hotel to meet with him? I remembered Mark Goldfinger. He was a classmate of mine in the Yeshiva in Chicago back in the day. He had pretty much left his Yeshiva education behind him, and had gone on to become a businessman. Now he

wanted to meet with me. What could he possibly want with a Rosh Yeshiva? I decided to go meet with him.

When I arrived at the hotel, he was sitting at a table in the corner, and I went to sit with him. He told me that his health is failing and that he realizes that his days are numbered. He had done very well in business, but he had no children to whom to leave his wealth. He decided he wanted to leave all his money to yeshivot, and he wanted me to be the one to determine which yeshivot would receive it since I am a Rosh Yeshiva and am knowledgeable in this area.

I asked him, “Why must you wait until you die to give the money? Give it now while you are alive! I will guide you, and then you will have the merit of the charity during your lifetime. It is worth much more! It may even prolong your life!” He would not hear of it. The more I pressed it, the more agitated he became. I realized it was a dead end. In the end, they took my passport number and wrote in the will that I would be the one to determine which yeshivot would receive the money from his estate.

This morning, they called me from the Office of the Interior and asked me if I remember Mr. Mark Goldfinger. I said I do, and they told me that he passed away and that I was named in his will to give out his money. Would I please bring my passport and come down to their offices? I went down, and they checked my passport against the information in the will, and it checked out.

Then they opened the door and in walked 15 monks, with the long brown robes and shaved heads. They asked me to choose from the monks which should receive the money. I was incredulous. “Monks?! Monks?! What are they doing here? He wanted his money to go to yeshivot!! He spoke to me about it! That is why he chose me!!”

“In his will he wrote that his money was to go to people that study the bible, not the Talmud. These are the people who study bible.”

“He wanted it to go to Yeshivot!!” I persisted, but to no avail. They would not budge. They had to fulfill the will as they saw fit.”

That is why I am in so much pain. I can't get over the loss of all that money to the Yeshivot and it going to the monks! I don't know what to do with myself.”

This story illustrates the point of Harav Shach ל"צ. One must have the merit to give to the right charity. This person thought that he would be able to earn reward in the World to Come for his charity to the Yeshivot, but, because he lacked the proper merit, it went to the monks.

The money that Hashem gives us is precious. He has entrusted us with it, and, as His executors, He expects us to give it to His worthy causes. With it we can earn a place in the world to come, but we must first be worthy. This is the gift that Hashem gives to those who take the matter seriously and do their homework on where to give their money. Hashem rewards them with the blessing of giving their charity to worthy institutions. The Torah thus counter-intuitively, yet quite correctly, formulates the giving of charity as *“Take for Me.”*