

## **A Weekly Byte... from Isralight (Portion of Terumah)**

*Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*  
From **Rav Binny Freedman**

*There are many different ways to be inspired ,and fill your soul; Most people are blessed on occasion with such an experience through events of great magnitude and significance: listening to the words and thoughts of a true Torah scholar or great mind, or standing in prayer with fifty thousand Jews at the Kotel (the Western Wall) celebrating the festival of the giving of the Torah (Shavuot), or even experiencing the moment of silence in Israel on the morning of Memorial day, as an entire country just stops to honor its fallen heroes.*

*But sometimes inspiration comes in the simplest of moments, like a good cup of coffee. Now don't get me wrong: there is nothing simple about a good cup of coffee, and as any true caffeine addict will attest, that first early morning cup of brew may well be the closest most of us will get to understanding the resurrection of the dead and the experiencing of heaven on earth!*

*I recall once drinking a cup of coffee that was truly an inspiration, not because of the coffee, but more because of the person who brought it.*

*In the fall of 2000, immediately after the current 'phase' of hostilities resumed, my unit was called up on special emergency orders (known as a 'Tzav Shmoneh'). I still recall the middle of the night phone call just after Rosh Hashanah, from my battalion commander telling me to get my gear together and report to base. In response to my query of when I needed to be there his response was 'I'll see you in an hour', and when I asked how long I could expect to be in for his answer was: "Ein li musag" "I have no idea", which was a shock coming from a battalion commander.*

*I had never experienced this before, having served in Lebanon when I was still in the regular army, not in the reserves, at a time when I was young, with no job, family, or real attachment.*

*Normal reserve duty, interrupting as it does the flow of one's civilian life is difficult enough, but this was an entirely different experience. Normally the army has to give you forty days notice before calling you up to the reserves, but here there was no warning, and we had no idea how long we would be in for.*

*The challenge of having your entire life turned upside down in an instant, with no time to prepare for it, is hard to describe. All the normal things one takes for granted, the business meetings, earning opportunities, family birthdays and anniversaries, planned vacations or work related projects - everything is put on hold as you try to mentally adjust from the classes you assumed you would be preparing, to managing a company's responses to gun battles, potential terrorist attacks, possible mass attacks against civilians and the general stresses of dealing with a hundred other men so suddenly thrust into army life without a moment's preparation.*

*However, with all of these challenges, by far the most depressing aspect of it was our proximity to home.*

*My experiences on the 'front lines' until this point were always relatively far from home. Whether up in Lebanon or somewhere over the green line during the Intifada, my connection to home during difficult duty had always been by phone. And as much as it is always nice to be near home, psychologically, an entire day's trip to whatever hot zone we were in also gave us a chance to adjust and put home in the back pocket.*

*As depressing as heading back into the army and leaving ‘civilization’ behind is, the long bus trip usually gives you the time to reacclimatize yourself to being back in the army, and you make the best of it. In fact, Sundays were always the most depressing days in the army, because you had just left home, didn’t really know when (and sometimes even if ever) you would see it again, and so you missed it terribly. But as the week wore on, you put home out of your mind, and could usually get out of the post-home funk, and back into higher spirits.*

*But this time, we were defending and patrolling a line that was ten minutes from home. And while it resulted in a very high motivation level, as we were protecting our homes and families, it was incredibly depressing to be dodging bullets or even stuck on patrol with your wife and kids just ten minutes away and yet so out of reach.*

*It was (and continues to be) a surreal type of war, where you could grab a couple hours at home and then head back out on patrol. But rather than boost our spirits, it actually became extremely difficult to pull out of a constant and nagging depression.*

*I recall, about a week into it, stopping my patrol by one of our guard posts overlooking the Arab village of Chirbet Aliah (near Bethlehem) to check up on a few of my men, and listening to yet another soldier trying to understand what was going on. We both just stood rather miserably, staring out at the Arab city of Beit Lechem, contemplating the sobering thought that we were once again in uniform, without any idea of how long we were ‘stuck’, and considering the very real possibility of a massive armed attack against our homes and families.*

*Just then, the lights of a civilian car pulled up to the top of the hill. As it was nearly three in the morning, we approached the vehicle with caution, until we smelled the incredible aroma of freshly brewed coffee coming from the open car.*

*Josh, a good friend who had made Aliyah late enough to have missed being called up to the army, could not stand the thought of his friends up alone on patrol and decided to single-handedly bring coffee and cake to all the guard positions, a feat he repeated nearly every night for almost two months!*

*It is hard to describe what an impact it makes on your morale to know someone cares that much, and I can honestly say his was a tremendous contribution to the war effort....*

What is the nature of giving? We normally view contributions relative to their size or based on the unique character of the particular service being offered. But sometimes, giving is not about the ‘what’ or the ‘where’, it is really about the ‘who’.

This week’s portion, *Terumah*, begins with the notion of giving, and contributing:

G-d says to Moshe: “*Daber el B’nei Yisrael Ve’yikchu’ Li **Terumah**, me’et kol ish asher yidvenu’ libo’ tikchu’ et **Terumati**’, Ve’zot Ha’**Terumah** asher tikhu’ me’itam: zahav va’chesev, u’nechoshet....”*

*“Speak to the people of Israel and let them take for me an offering (**Terumah**), from every man whose heart motivates him, take my offering (**Terumati**’ ). And this is the offering (**Terumah**) you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper....” (Exodus (Shemot) 25:2-3)*

What is the nature of this *Terumah*, this offering G-d is asking us for? How do you give anything, let alone a specific offering to G-d?

This week’s portion is the first in a series of five portions that deal almost exclusively with the process involved in building the *Mishkan*, the tent of meeting (also known as the Tabernacle) which will serve as

the focal point of the Jewish people and eventually will give way to the *Beit HaMikdash*, the holy temple in Jerusalem. And it was for the building of this holy tent, where G-d's presence would rest, that the Jewish people were being asked to donate their gold, silver, copper and other items of value.

Why were the Jewish people asked to do all of this giving for a tent (which will one day be a building) for G-d? Why does G-d need a building? And if, on some level, the *Mishkan* is meant to be about giving, why go to the *Mishkan* to give? Just give of yourself in the world!

**Rashi** (quoting the Jerusalem Talmud in *Shekalim*1:1) points out that there were actually three different collections of offerings here, as denoted by the fact that the word *Terumah* (offering) is used three times in the verse above:

1. "*Ve'yikchu' Li Terumah*" (take for me an offering) refers to the collection of a shekel per person which was specifically designated for the sockets or *Adanim*, (that held the boards that made up the wall of the courtyard of the *Mishkan*, as mentioned in Exodus 38:26).
2. "*Tikchu' et Terumati*" (take my offering) refers to the shekel per person collected for the public sacrifices (as mentioned in Exodus 30:15).
3. "*Ha' Terumah*" (the offering) which is what our portion here is referring to, was a general collection of various materials such as gold, silver, copper and a list of thirteen items mentioned at the beginning of this week's portion, appropriately named *Terumah*.

There are a number of questions this short 'list' of *terumot* (offerings) raises:

First of all, why is there a necessity for three separate collections, ostensibly at three separate times? Especially considering that they are all mentioned in the Torah, why couldn't Moshe have collected all of them at one time? Obviously, where G-d is concerned the possibility that no one had thought of it, or that they ran out of money is difficult, to say the least. One would imagine that if anyone could plan a fundraising campaign that raises exactly what is needed, no more and no less, it would be G-d! So, why the need for three separate collections?

Further, if these *terumot* were indeed collected at different times, why are they all mentioned at the beginning of this week's portion? Why not just wait until they are actually collected (in the portions of *Ki Tissah* and *Pekudei* respectively)?

And, if the Torah does choose to mention them, why not specify what they are? Why mention three different *terumot* (offerings) and yet only delineate what one of them was in the verse (the third *Terumah*...)?

It is also interesting to note the difference, linguistically, in the manner these three *terumot* are mentioned:

The first, for the sockets of the courtyard walls, is described as "*an offering*" ("*Terumah*"), but the Torah also specifies that it should be offered "*Li*" "to Me". The second offering (for the sacrifices) is described as "*my offering*" ("*Terumati*") and the third delimited here for the general building of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) itself, is referred to as: "*Ha' Terumah*" (the offering).

Why does one of these *Terumot* seemingly belong to G-d more than the others? And why is one apparently not as associated with G-d, and simply described as "*The Terumah*" and not G-d's *Terumah* (or the *Terumah* which will be offered to Me...)?

It stands to reason that if the Torah takes the time to describe offerings to the *Mishkan* as three separate offerings, they must represent three separate (though obviously still connected) ideas.

And it further makes sense that all three of these ideas all fall under the general heading of being a part of building a place for G-d in this world, which is essentially the message alluded to throughout the building of the *Mishkan*.

Indeed, **Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson** (the late **Lubavitcher Rebbe** of blessed memory) suggests the idea that building the *Mishkan* is really an allegory for how we are meant to build the world, and as such, these three different offerings represent the three different areas in which we interact with and contribute to the world.

The *Mishnah* in Ethics of the fathers (*Pirkei Avoth* 1:2) suggests that the world stands on three pillars: *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *Gemillut Chassadim*. (Torah study, Service to G-d, or prayer, and acts of loving kindness.) And this, suggests Rav Schneerson is why the Torah asks the Jewish people to give these three offerings separately, because it allows them (and us) the opportunity to consider each of these ideas separately.

Which leaves us with a need to understand exactly what these three ideas are, and how they form the pillars of the world in Jewish thought.

The first offering represents Torah, which is the basis for everything. The foundation not only of our relationship with G-d, but with our fellow human beings as well, is given to us as a recipe, which we call Torah. Indeed, because we believe that G-d created the world, and all of us in it, and because it would be hard to imagine that G-d created us for no reason, G-d has to, at some point, clarify what that reason, or purpose, really is. At some point, Hashem has to reveal what it is we are meant to be doing here, and how we are meant to go about doing it. This revelation, where G-d reveals the purpose of everything, in Judaism is called Torah. The Torah is essentially the blueprint for life and living. Which is why it is an offering specifically designated for the Adanim, or sockets, on which the entire wall's foundation rests. And that is why it is described as the Terumah that is "*Li*" (To Me"): Much more than the fact that we are offering this offering to G-d, we are really taking (hence the word *Ve'Yikchu*, (to take) instead of *Va'Yitnu*, to give, because the Torah is given to us from heaven, but we have to decide whether we want to partake of it and learn from it. The Torah was meant to influence us, we were never meant to influence it.

This *Terumah* then, represents all those aspects of life that we are meant purely to receive, but not necessarily to change. How often do we find ourselves, in interacting with those closest to us, thinking of how we need to change them? And yet, deep down we know, that the closer we are to the person in question, the less probable that we will ever succeed in 'getting them to change'. This does not mean to say that we do not effect change in others, but most often, especially with those we are close to, it is less because we choose to give them a lesson, and more because they choose to take it from us. Hashem gives us this magnificent recipe and desperately wants us to partake of it, but that is ultimately up to us.

And then there is the second offering, which represents *Avodah*, or service to Hashem. Essentially, where the Torah is about what G-d gives us, *Avodah* is about what we attempt to give back to G-d. This does not mean to say that G-d needs what we have to give, but rather, we need to be in the process of giving to G-d. Indeed, *Tefillah* (prayer) in Judaism is all about exploring who I am, and what I have to give in this world.

Often, people presume that prayer is about asking G-d for the things I want, but in truth, Jewish prayer is much more about understanding the things I *could* want, and if what we want is a function of who we are, then this process becomes all about discovering what I have to give back to G-d. To quote **Rav A.Y. Ha'Kohen Kook** (in his *Olat Ha're'iyah, Inyanei Tefillah* 1:3) "*Tefillah begs of the soul to reveal its purpose in this world.*"

Ultimately, we are put in this world in our own unique role, with our own very special gifts, and our challenge is to figure out what we are meant to do with all that we are given. And this is very much a part of what *Tefillah* is all about. Hence, the particular *Terumah* (offering) referred to here is the offering for the sacrifices, upon which our prayers are based (see *Talmud Berachot* 26a). Ultimately the sacrifice represents what I have to offer (or give back) in this world. Indeed, it is precisely the ability to recognize even the animal side of myself and how it too can be harnessed to bring peace and ethics into the world that is the root of both the sacrifices, as well as *Tefillah* (prayer) itself.

Perhaps this is why this *Terumah* is described as “*My (G-d’s) offering* “ (“*Terumati*”), because it is precisely the recognition that all the skills, talents and opportunities we have in this world are really given to us as gifts for a purpose, that is at the core of the *Tefillah* experience. Thus, these offerings are not things that are ours and which we choose to give back to G-d, but rather things given us by G-d so that we can give back to the world. It is precisely the recognition that they are really Hashem’s ‘offerings’, that allow us to live up to the purpose for which they were given to us in the first place.

And the last *Terumah*, (offering) which represents loving-kindness or *Chesed*, are the things that become the vehicles for having such an impact in this world: the gold, and silver and tangible items with which we impact the world around us. This is the offering of all the physical actions and mitzvot with which we impact the world.

The first two offerings, representing *Torah* and *Avodah* (Torah study and prayer or service to G-d, are basically opportunities for us to develop ourselves and our relationship with G-d. It is only with the third offering that we actually impact the physical world both in terms of objects (represented by the gold and silver) as well as the people around us. (Note that the animal sacrifices could not be offered until it was set aside and sanctified).

Which brings us full circle to this week’s portion: If indeed, these three separate *Terumot* represent the essence of Judaism and three pillars of how we achieve our purpose in the world, then why are the first two (Torah and service, or prayer) alluded to, while it is only the third, representing action and mitzvot that is delineated?

You see, when we study, what we are really doing is tapping into the thought process of G-d. Think about it: The Jewish understanding of G-d is that G-d has no limits, which means that if G-d thinks something, then that thought always was. It would make no sense to assume that G-d thought of something new today, because that would mean that yesterday there was something G-d had not yet thought of. So when we explore the endless sea of Torah, we are connecting with the purpose of creation and the essence of what life is all about. That is why the Talmud suggests that there is no joy in this world like the joy of the study of Torah, because if true joy is all about purpose (people become depressed when they feel there is or they have no purpose...) then there is no better way to explore what my purpose might be than to study the recipe wherein G-d reveals the purpose of everything.

Ultimately, a relationship with Torah is a decision that my purpose is not about me, but comes from a higher place and is more about creating a better world, as created and described in the Torah.

But there is a danger here, because this can be such an intoxicating experience that one has a hard time ever leaving it. What could be better than to live a life of exploring the thought process of G-d? And if that is my life, then I will know all about what purpose could be, but I won’t necessarily ever figure out what my own purpose really is. This is where *Avodah*, or *Tefillah* comes into play. Because it is in exploring what I really want in this world that I begin to discover what I want to do with the ideas G-d has given me.

Prayer challenges me to become a different, and even a better person.

The study of Torah can teach me the objective value of peace, and give me the objective definition of when it is a time for peace, and when it is a time for war; the Torah can even teach us what type of peace inevitably leads to war, and what type of war creates the space for peace, and how I could achieve it. But it is the experience of *Tefillah* (prayer) that measures whether I really want it.

Just because I have discovered what ethical behavior is, does not necessarily mean I yearn for it. And the first stage of changing the world is developing the *desire* to change the world. If no one wants something then it will not exist, because there is no vehicle for Hashem to bring it into the world. A world of Torah without *Avodah*, or prayer, which itself represents not just the knowledge of G-d but a relationship with G-d, is a world which is missing a crucial component.

But here too, this is not enough. A person can live a life immersed in the study of Torah and the experience of *Avodat Hashem* or prayer. Such a person can develop a deep and powerful relationship with G-d, and amass incredible volumes of knowledge and understanding into the way G-d runs the world. But until these achievements impact the world beyond one's own self, they fall far short of what Judaism is all about.

At the end of the day, the Torah here alludes to all three of these offerings, to make clear that without any one of these, there is something missing in who we are and how we could make a difference in the world. At the same time, it is only the third offering, representing the actions that I actually do, which impact the world around me, that is spelled out here, perhaps because we need to remember that this is actually the goal.

The goal in building a tabernacle (*Mishkan*) is not to leave the world, for a monastic life up high, but to make it better from the ground up.

A life which has never experienced the joy of the study of Torah, or the power of connecting with G-d or with one's own purpose, whether in Synagogue on Yom Kippur, or in the Valley of Tears all alone in the Golan Heights, is certainly missing a major component of what Judaism is all about. But so is the life which flies on the wings of eagles, delving into Torah study and prayer and establishing a deep connection with G-d, but which never brings that Torah knowledge, or the gift of that elevated relationship with G-d back into the world.

The purpose of building a tabernacle (and later a *Beit HaMikdash* or Temple) was never about leaving the world behind; it was always about a partnership with G-d to create a better world. And while it is only through a synthesis of these three areas that we can truly achieve this, this week's portion comes to remind us of the importance of recognizing the difference between the process and the goal itself.

May we all merit soon, to experience the true meaning of these three facets of our interaction with the world around us, together, in the streets of Yerushalayim.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rav Binny Freedman