

Sparks

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The Gift of Giving: *Love's Secret Service*

In this week's Torah Portion we are commanded to bring pure oil to the tabernacle to light the Menorah (candelabra).

"And you (Moses) shall command the children of Israel, that they bring to you pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually." (Exodus 27:20)

The Midrash, which part of Jewish Oral Tradition, asks an obvious question. The entire world is illuminated by G-d's splendor and yet He tells the Jewish people to bring oil to light the Menorah before Him? The Midrash answers that G-d desires the works of your hands.

How can we understand that G-d desires the works of our hand?

How can G-d want something from us?

What can we give G-d?

Does G-d lack anything that we can provide?

The Kabbalah teaches that G-d created the world to give us goodness and yet it seems from the Midrash that G-d is not looking to give but really wants to receive. How can this be?

The Kabbalah explains that the greatest goodness that G-d gives us is Himself – the opportunity to bond with G-d. And of-course we bond with G-d by giving of ourselves to Him just as we bond with each other when we give to each other.

A story is told about a couple who were separated during World War II. Their youngest son ended up with his father. Twenty years later the father and mother were finally reunited. Who do you think felt a greater love for the boy the father or the mother? The father. Even though the mother had a natural maternal feeling of connection to her child, she was robbed the opportunity to give to her child all those years. It is through giving to someone that we bond with her. The more you invest yourself in another person the more you become one with her.

I think parents feel closer to their children than children to their parents. This is because parents give more to their children than the children give to their parents. I love changing my son's diaper. It is an opportunity to bond. People often give their children over to someone else to take care of their daily needs -- feed them, clean them, play with them, read to them, etc.. Why give that gift away. Of course there are other ways to give and everyone has their own challenges to deal with. But don't give away the gift of giving. We can only bond with each when we give to each other.

This is why so many marriages break down. He is looking to see what he can get from her and she is looking to see what she can get from him. However, when they discover that they can get more of what they want from someone else then they move on to greater opportunities. This is not true love this is just business. To succeed in truly loving a relationship you need to ask “What can I give?” and not “What can I get?”

G-d’s greatest gift to us is the opportunity to bond with Him and that can only happen when we are able to give of ourselves to G-d. This is why serving G-d is the greatest joy.

People have it all confused. They think that G-d is some cosmic ego maniac Who wants to enslave everyone and demands that we do it with joy. G-d is just a selfish cosmic dictator Who wants us all to serve Him with a smile. This is ridiculous.

The life of commandments is not a life of bondage to God, it is a life of bonding with G-d. There is no greater joy.

On one hand people think that G-d is a slave driver and yet on the other hand they treat G-d like He is their waiter. They turn to G-d only when they need or want something, as if G-d is there just to fulfill our needs, do tricks and make our life easier. Is relationship with G-d about what you can get from G-d or what you can give to G-d?

The secret to a joyous life, the only true path to fulfillment is to ask not what G-d can for you but what you can do for G-d. A life of divine service is filled with divine purpose and passion.

I recall a very interesting discussion with a taxi driver who shared with me a personal dilemma. He had just bought his wife an expensive piece of jewelry for her birthday. When he gave it to her he could tell by the expression on her face that she was not thrilled with the gift. Finally after some coaxing she admitted to him that although she really appreciates the thought she simply does not like jewelry. “I prefer just a quiet diner together in a cozy restaurant,” she shared. He, however, felt quite hurt and found much resistance within himself to take back the jewelry and take her out to dinner as she had asked.

He asked me, "If love is giving why do I resist to giving her what she wants?" I suggested that perhaps it is because we feel a gift should express a free desire to give. “Once she asked you for what she wants perhaps you felt robbed of your initiative. You felt your freedom to give was somewhat diminished,” I explained.

There is a strange dynamic that happens in relationships. We often don’t like our spouse telling us what they want or even that they want something at all. We want it to be our idea, our surprise. We want to give but as an expression of our own loving initiative.

And then there are times when we don’t know what to get our beloved so we ask, “What can I get you for your birthday?” And the answer is often, “Surprise me.” (And don’t? you dare get them a gift certificate.) In other words, our beloved also wants the gift to be our initiative – our idea. But, of-course, they are hoping that we can read their mind and surprise them with exactly what they always wanted.

Perhaps this is why G-d says to Moses in this week's portion, "Ata Tezvah-- You command". Make the commandment your idea. In other words, G-d is telling Moses to say to the Israelites, "Hey guys I have an idea let's bring the purest oil to the menorah and bring a light to G-d, it will be a surprise."

The commandments are G-d's gift to us--- the gift of giving to G-d, the opportunity to serve G-d and thereby bond with G-d. However, we should aspire to do them with the same kind of joy we would feel as if it is our idea.

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