

## Parshas Terumah

# Three Gifts, Three Pillars

*G-d instructs the Jewish people to erect the Tabernacle in the desert, and to donate funds for its purposes. The instructions for these donations vary, however. This Sicha explores the differences of each, and brings a deeper understanding to the three modes of serving the Almighty.*

This week’s Torah portion begins with G-d commanding the Jewish people concerning the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) that was to be erected. The Jewish people were instructed to donate both materials and funds toward the construction of this G-dly sanctuary.

### Text 1

Speak to the children of Israel, and have them take (for) Me an offering; from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering. And this is the offering that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper...

*Shemos 25:2-3*

In delineating how the Israelites should consecrate their possessions to provide the materials for this sanctuary, the verse repeats the term “offering” (*terumah*) three times. The verses state: “take (for) Me an offering,” “you shall take My offering,” and again repeats, “And this is the offering that you shall take.”

The Sages explain that each of these three expressions alludes to a different type of donation needed for the building and upkeep of the *Mishkan*.

### Text 2

[The word *terumah*, mentioned three times, denotes that] three offerings are mentioned here. One is the offering of a *beka* [half-*shekel*] per head, from which they made the sockets, as is delineated in (*Parshas*) *V’eileh Pekudei*. Another is the offering of a *beka* per head for the [community] coffers, from which to purchase the communal sacrifices, and another is the offering for the *Mishkan*, each one’s [Israelite’s] donation.

*Rashi, Shemos 25:2*

Each mention of the word “offering” (*terumah*) refers to a separate type of donation that was given for the building of the *Mishkan*.

The first mention of the word is in reference to the half-*shekel* of silver that every individual donated. These were used to build sockets that were to serve as foundations for the walls.

The second use of the word “offering” was in reference to another half-*shekel*, which was donated for the purpose of communal sacrifices.

The third reference of the word “offering” is mentioned in regard to any other materials that were needed for the construction of the Tabernacle.

### Why only hints?

Although all three of these various offerings are mentioned in *Parshas Terumah*, there is a distinctly different manner in which they are

each enumerated. While all three types of offering are stated in the *parsha*, only the last is focused on in detail.

The first two types of offerings are only hinted to in the words, “take for Me an offering,” and “you shall take My offering.” The third category however, expressed in the words, “And this is the offering that you shall take,” is enumerated with its particularities.

The Torah says:

### Text 3

And this is the offering that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and crimson wool; linen and goat hair; ram skins dyed red, *tachash* skins, and acacia wood; oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the incense; *shoham* stones and filling stones for the *ephod* and for the *choshen*.

Shemos 25:3-7

All the specific materials that the Israelites were to bring for the building of the Tabernacle are mentioned in great detail. While the Torah brushes over the other forms of offerings to the *Mishkan*, it discusses this one at great length.

Notwithstanding the brevity in which the Torah mentions the first two types of offerings, all three of these donations were in fact exceedingly important for the *Mishkan* to properly function.

**The donation for the sockets:** These were an actual element in the edifice of the Tabernacle.

**The donation of the half-*shekel*:** The purpose of the *Mishkan* was for it to be a place that was “prepared for sacrifices to be offered within it.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rambam, Beis Habechirah 1:1.

The half-*shekel* that was donated for the purpose of communal sacrifices enabled the *Mishkan* to serve in this capacity.

**The donations to the *Mishkan*:** These included all the various materials that were important for the *Mishkan*'s assembly and for fashioning the priests' special garments.

This begs the question: If all three expressions found in the beginning of *Parshas Terumah* were indeed important for the construction of the *Mishkan*, why then, is the contribution regarding the actual materials of the *Mishkan* the only one clearly enumerated in the *parsha* and the rest only hinted to?

It cannot be said that the reason for this was that the Torah wished to recount only those details that were important for the actual *building* of the *Mishkan*—and for that reason it only *hinted* to the donations that were to be given towards the communal sacrifices—as that was not the only offering that was left out. The sockets were integral to the construction of the actual edifice and they too were only alluded to and not explicitly stated.

It is therefore understood that there must be another reason as to why only one form of donation was clearly expressed and the others were only inferred from the extra words “offering” mentioned in the verse.

### Variant expressions

Upon observing the language that the Torah employs when mentioning the various donations, one notices distinctions between each of the three expressions. The expressions, “take (for) Me an offering (*li terumah*),” “you shall take My offering (*terumasi*),” and “this is the offering that you shall take,” are each worded slightly differently.

Each of them mentions G-d in a variant manner.

**Take (for) Me an offering:** In reference to the half-*shekel* that was used for the sockets, the verse says, “(for) Me an offering.” In Hebrew this is stated as, “*li terumah*,” the expressions for “Me” and “offering” are separated as two different words.

**You shall take My offering:** Concerning the donation for communal sacrifices, the Torah calls it, “My offering.” The Hebrew word that is used here is, “*terumasi*.” In this case, the terms “My” and “offering” create one word.

**This is the offering that you shall take:** In regard to the materials that were used for the construction of the *Mishkan*, all reference to G-d is completely left out.

What is the significance of the structural differences that the Torah uses in referencing these various offerings?

### The Medrash

Pertaining to the materials for the *Mishkan's* construction (gold, silver, copper, etc.), the Medrash explains that the specific substances that were used correlate to the various exiles that the Jewish people endured.

#### Text 4

Gold, corresponding to the Babylonian Empire, as it says,<sup>2</sup> “You [Nevuchadnetzar] are the head of gold.” Silver, corresponding to the Persian Empire, as it is written,<sup>3</sup> “ten thousand silver talents [which Haman offered to Achashveirosh, on behalf of the destruction of the Jewish people].” Copper, corresponding to the Greek Empire, for it is the least valued of all of them, and ram skins dyed red, corresponding to the

<sup>2</sup> Daniel 2:38.

<sup>3</sup> Esther 3:9.

Edomite Empire, as it says,<sup>4</sup> “And the first one [Esav] emerged ruddy.”

*Medrash Tanchuma, Terumah 7*

The association between the materials used to build the *Mishkan* and the various exiles seems extremely perplexing. Why, when discussing the substances that were used in *building* of *Mishkan*, the forerunner of the Temple, would we reference those very nations that later brought about the Temple's *destruction*?!

### Three pillars

While G-d specifically commanded the Jewish people to erect a sanctuary for Him in the form of the *Mishkan*, G-d as well wished that we should create a sanctuary for Him within the entire world. G-d desires that we should transform the Earth completely, and make it into a “dwelling place” for Himself.

In order to create a dwelling place for G-d here in the physical world, there are three ways through which this is attained: the study of Torah, the service of G-d and the performance of kind deeds.

#### Text 5

Shimon the Righteous was among the last surviving members of the Great Assembly. He would say: The world stands on three things: Torah, the service of G-d, and deeds of kindness.

*Pirkei Avos 1:2*

These three facets through which the world is transformed into a G-dly place are hinted to in

<sup>4</sup> Bereishis 25:25.

the three offerings through which the physical sanctuary for G-d, the *Mishkan*, was built as well.

It was for this reason that the Almighty did not simply request that the Jewish people give *one* large donation to provide for all of the *Mishkan's* needs. Instead, He divided the gifts into three diverse types, as each of these three donations were indicative of a separate way by which to transform the world.

The connections between the three donations and the three manners of spiritual service are as follows:

**Sockets:** These served as the foundation of the *Mishkan's* structure. The basis and foundation of all of Judaism is rooted in the Torah. All the various ways of serving G-d stem from the Torah. Similar to the sockets that upheld the walls of the *Mishkan*, the Torah upholds all of Jewish life.

**Communal offerings:** The purchase of the communal sacrifices represents the concept of the service of G-d. The concept of prayer as well relates to the service of the Almighty, as it was instituted in place of the communal sacrifices.<sup>5</sup>

**Materials for construction:** These resources included all sorts of physical materials used to build a sanctuary for G-d. This is as well the concept of all of the *mitzvos*—to take the physical substances of the world and to use them for a G-dly purpose.

#### **Connecting to G-d**

Though the study of Torah, service of G-d, and physical *mitzvos* are all necessary elements in the service of the Almighty, they each highlight a different aspect of our Divine service.

**Torah:** While the entire concept of *mitzvos* exists as commandments *for* the Jewish people, Torah, however, is separate from the existence of the Jewish people and existed *prior* to the world's

creation. This is expressed in the following verse in which King Solomon described the Torah:

#### **Text 6**

I was then His nursling, I was then His delight every day, playing before Him at all times.

*Mishlei 8:30*

The Torah is called “*His* nursling,” and “*His* delight,” and that which plays “before *Him* at all times.” Torah is the delight of G-d. It exists separately and was present prior to the creation of the Jewish people.

Even after the Torah has already been given to the Jewish people and is learned by them, it remains somewhat removed from them. Torah is not human intellect but rather G-dly wisdom that is distant from human understanding. This is expressed in the *halacha* (law) stating that a person can learn Torah even when they are in a state of impurity. This is so, because Torah remains separate from the individual and does not become impure when an impure individual studies it.

#### **Text 7**

It has been taught: R. Yehudah ben Baseira used to say: “Words of Torah are not susceptible of uncleanness.” Once a certain disciple was mumbling over against R. Yehudah ben Baseira. He said to him: “My son, open your mouth and let your words be clear, for words of Torah are not susceptible to uncleanness, as it says,<sup>6</sup> ‘Is not My word like as fire?’ Just as fire is not susceptible of uncleanness, so words of Torah are not susceptible of uncleanness.”

*Berachos 22a*

<sup>5</sup> Talmud, Berachos 26b.

<sup>6</sup> Yirmiya 23:29.

Although Torah becomes encloded in human intellect, it remains a G-dly wisdom and separate from man.

**Service of G-d:** The idea of the service of G-d is expressed through the sacrifices in the *Mishkan* and through prayer. In both of these acts the intent is for the individual to become close to G-d. This concept is conveyed in G-d's instruction concerning sacrifices. The verse says:

### Text 8

When a man among you brings an offering to G-d.

*Vayikra 1:2*

While the translation reads, "When a man among you brings an offering," a literal translation of the Hebrew reads, "When a man brings close." The spiritual concept of sacrifice (and prayer) is that an individual brings himself closer to G-dliness.

The idea of prayer is that a person should reach—through his *own* efforts—the greatest spiritual levels that are attainable to him. Although the levels that man can reach *on his own* are considerably lower than the spiritual levels of the Torah, there is an advantage to prayer over Torah. For, whereas in Torah learning man is separate from it, and no matter how much he studies its knowledge, Torah remains a G-dly wisdom, with prayer, man himself becomes fused with the spiritual levels that he has attained and identifies with them.

**Good deeds:** The performance of *mitzvos* is not only a personal mode of serving G-d, but it

affects the world around him as well. The purpose of *mitzvos* is to transform the physicality itself into holiness.

While the spiritual intensity of Torah and prayer are more amplified than in the performance of *mitzvos*, there is an advantage to service of G-d through *mitzvos* over that of Torah and prayer.

Torah and prayer share a common denominator, in that concerning both, the person's service of G-d is strictly personal. When the individual studies Torah, *his* intellect becomes permeated with G-d's wisdom, and when he prays *he* becomes spiritual.<sup>7</sup> The world around him however, does not change.

Not so with serving G-d through the medium of the *mitzvos*. The intent of the *mitzvos* is to take the physical as it remains physical and to transform it into a *mitzvah*.

### The three expressions

From the above elucidation, the differences between the phrasings of the three instructions for the offerings in the *Mishkan* can now be understood as well.

**"Take (for) Me an offering"** references Torah. The idea of Torah is expressed in the word "take," as opposed to the word "give." Being that Torah remains separate from man, it is a G-dly wisdom that a person takes and understands (to an extent) in his own mind.

When a person learns Torah he takes "Me." When an individual studies the Torah, he takes G-d Himself, as Torah and G-d are completely one.

was for this reason that first the individual would consecrate the animal, and only then could he bring it as a sacrifice.

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding physical sacrifices, their intent was not to bring G-dliness *into* the mundane but to elevate and *transform* the physical from its natural state. It

## Text 9

... Because the Torah and the Holy One, Blessed be He, are one. The meaning of this is that the Torah, which is the wisdom and will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and His glorious Essence are one, since He is both the Knower and the Knowledge and so on, as explained above in the name of Maimonides...For the Holy One, blessed be He, has compressed His will and wisdom within the 613 commandments of the Torah and in their laws, as well as within the combination of the letters of the Torah, the books of the Prophets and the Hagiographa, and in the exposition thereof which are to be found in the *Agadot* and *Midrashim* of our Rabbis of blessed memory.

*Tanya, Ch. 4*

The wording, **“Take (for) Me”** indicates that through the study of Torah one is actually “taking” the Almighty Himself, so to speak, in His essence!

This also explains why the words *“vayikchu li,”* (take (for) Me) are separated into two distinct words.

When a person “takes” G-d during his Torah study, it is not because the individual has accomplished any grand achievement. It is rather because G-d is en clothed in the Torah, that an individual who studies Torah is able to “take” G-d. The person who “takes” G-d through the study of Torah remains separate from G-d to an extent, as he did not truly merit on his own the awesome levels that he is “taking.”

**“My offering” (terumasi)** expresses the opposite point. When a person prays, he raises himself to the Heavens and he *himself* becomes one with the spiritual levels that he has reached.

It is for this reason that the word the Torah uses is *“terumasi,”* a composite word meaning “My

offering.” This represents that when a person prays, he becomes *united* with G-d.

**“And this is the offering that you shall take”** describes the *mitzvos*. When the Torah discusses *mitzvos*, the reference to G-d is not even mentioned.

This is because when a person does the *mitzvos*, he does not focus on the spiritual and instead focuses on the physical. When a person fulfills *mitzvos*, the connection to G-d is not readily apparent, and therefore the verse makes no mention of G-d.

### Explicit vs. hinted

Though the *mitzvos* are performed through physical objects, and are least expressive of G-d in a revealed way, it is specifically through *mitzvos* that G-d’s ultimate intent and final plan for the universe can be fulfilled.

## Text 10

R. Shmuel bar Nachman said: “At the time when the Holy One, Blessed be He created the world, He desired that there should be an abode for Him in the lower worlds just as there is in the higher worlds...”

*Medrash Tanchuma, Naso 16*

It is the action of revealing G-dliness in the lower realms, and elevating the *mundane* to reach a holy state, that accomplishes the Almighty’s true desire—the wish for the lowest of the worlds to be permeated with His Presence.

However, in order for this to be achieved in its proper way, it must be predicated by the two initial steps of Torah and prayer. When a person is permeated with G-dliness through Torah and prayer, it ensures that he will permeate the physical with G-dliness as well. Transforming the

world into a sanctuary for G-d is accomplished through *mitzvos* after the preface of Torah and prayer.

Since the material construction of the *Mishkan* and the performance of physical *mitzvos* is the main and ultimate goal, its donations are spoken of in an explicit manner, while Torah and prayer are only hinted to and not enumerated at length.

The preceding two gifts—those of the sockets and the communal offerings—correspond to the modes of service that merely *build up to* and prepare for the fulfillment of transforming the physical into a G-dly abode through the *mitzvos*. They are therefore only alluded to in *Parshas Terumah*, as they are not the ultimate intent.

### Revealing G-d in exile

This is also the meaning of the Medrash's comparison of the *Mishkan's* materials to the four exiles, because it is specifically *in exile* where we transform the most mundane physicality into G-dliness.

It is during the times of exile, when physicality is felt much stronger than during the Temple times, that we fulfill G-d's wish in transforming this mundane world into a sanctuary.

When this goal is accomplished, we herald in the times of *Moshiach*. In the times of *Moshiach*, the advantage of the physical over the spiritual will be most strongly expressed, as conveyed in the fact that the future Temple that will be built will be constructed from inanimate objects. Thus expressing that the ultimate expression of G-dliness in objects that are the most physical.

May it happen speedily in our times!

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 16, Terumah 2, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel.)*

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