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**The Lower East Side  
Parshat HaShavua sheet**

*A collection of Divrei Torah  
from around the Internet*

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Parshat Terumah  
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*Latest time for Kriyat Shema – 9:25*

**GIVE & TAKE**

*By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

After an entire portion filled with commandments regarding man's obligation toward his fellow man, the Torah focuses on a very spiritual aspect of our existence. Hashem commands His nation to build a Tabernacle in which He would figuratively dwell. Thus the Torah begins this week's portion with a mainstay of Jewish life — the appeal.

The Torah instructs the Jewish nation to contribute gold, silver, and an array of other materials to the great cause of erecting and furnishing a Mishkan (Tabernacle). However the appeal is worded very strangely. Hashem does not ask the people to give; he asks them to take. [Exodus 25:2](#): "Speak to the children of Israel and let them take a portion for me." The question is obvious. Why does the Torah tell the people to take a portion when in essence they are giving a portion? What is the message behind the semantic anomaly?

*Max and Irving went fishing on an overcast afternoon. About two hours into their expedition a fierce storm developed. Their small rowboat tossed and tossed and finally flipped over into the middle of the lake. Max, a strong swimmer, called to save Irving, but to no avail. Irving did not respond to any plea and unfortunately drowned. Max swam to shore to break the terrible news to Irving's poor wife. "What happened?" she screamed. "Tell me the whole story!" Max recounted the entire episode in full detail. "But what did you do to try to save my Irving?" she shrieked. Max explained once again. "I kept screaming to your husband, 'Irving, give me your hand — give me your hand — Give me your hand! But Irving just gave me a blank stare and drifted away.'" "You fool!" shouted the widow. "You said the wrong thing. You should have said, 'take my hand.' Irving never gave anything to anybody!"*

We often make the same mistake that Irving made. When we hear the word "give" we recoil. In its first solicitation, the Torah is teaching us a lesson. When you give with true heart, you are not giving anything away. You are taking a share for yourself. Materialistic pleasures in which many people indulge are eventually digested and forgotten. The new cars become old ones, the glorious homes fall to disrepair, and the newest gizmos become outdated. The only items that remain are those that we give. They remain in a storehouse of merits and eventually will repay us and our descendants. The Montefiores and the Rothschilds are not forever cherished for opulence and indulgence. They are remembered for their great benevolence and charity. They not only gave for eternity. They received for eternity as well.

## **Elevating the Physical**

*By Rabbi Berel Wein*

The main moral thrust of this week's parsha is the challenge to take the mundane and ordinary and make of it something spiritual, holy and eternal. To our sorrow, we are well aware of how the supposedly holy can be made tawdry, cheap and negative. Thus the challenge of the opposite is truly a daunting one.

Dealing with money, gold and silver, workers, artisans and the like usually inhibits any sense of holiness and eternity. The material always seems to corrupt the spiritual. It is not for naught that there is strong rabbinic opinion that the Third Temple will not be man-made but rather will descend from Heaven completely formed. It is destined to be eternal while the Tabernacle/Mishkan in the desert and both the First and Second Temples were the products of human endeavor and earthly building materials.

All three of these great projects and physical institutions were destroyed and taken from us. Apparently we had failed in the goal of converting the earthly and temporary into the heavenly and eternal. So, if in fact this is the case then why does the Torah spend so much space and employ so many words to describe the physical construction of what, after all, remained only a temporary structure subject to conquest and destruction?

This is a question, which has nagged the brains of all biblical commentators for many centuries. It also poses the problem of this enormous challenge of the spiritual having to deal with the physical and in fact being dependent upon the physical in order to achieve its stated spiritual goal.

Part of the answer to this ongoing problem lies in the attitude of human beings towards the physical wealth that all of us pursue during our lifetime. The Torah wished to teach us that wealth, material goods, human talents and artistic abilities are all only means to an end and not the end itself. One of the great pitfalls of life is elevating the means to be the end.

Thus wealth for the sake of wealth, money for the sake of money, power and influence for the sake of power and influence becomes the norm in much of human society. This by its very nature prevents the transformation of the physical into the holy, the fleeting temporary into the unending eternal.

The true purpose of gold and silver, architectural talent and building skill is to create a place of holiness and a constant reminder of the relationship between the Creator and the created. Therefore this week's parsha emphasizes the importance of donative intent. The Tabernacle/Mishkan was not to be built from funds gathered by taxation and coercion. Without proper donative intent there is no hope to convert the physical into the spiritual.

Halacha raises the question why we do not recite a blessing before giving one's donation to charity or the support of Torah. Many answers, almost all of them technical, are advanced to solve this question. I am struck by the question itself. For the basis of its being asked is that somehow one must inject holiness into an otherwise ordinary act of money being transferred. How difficult this is if it is not preceded by the recitation of a blessing. Holy intent creates holiness and can transform the material into the spiritual.

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## **Inspiration Needs To Be Translated Into Physical Action**

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

Parshas Terumah follows Parshas Mishpatim, in which we read the famous words "na'aseh v'nishma" ["We will do and we will listen"]. [Shmos 24:7]. Those words were recited by the Children of Israel at the time of the Giving of the Torah. Immediately following this section, the Torah says "Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion..." [Shmos 25:2].

The Baal Shem Tov comments on this juxtaposition: Whenever a person is spiritually aroused, it is very important that he or she concretize that inspiration by practical action to channel the arousal and give it tangible physical manifestation. The Baal Shem Tov interprets the pasuk "Let us lift our hearts with our hands to G-d in Heaven" [Eicha 3:41] in just this manner. When our hearts are inspired, we must take that inspiration and put it into our hands, so to speak, via concrete action.

In the same vein, a beautiful Chassidic interpretation is quoted in the name of Kedushas Levi (Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev) on the pasuk "mah ta'iru, u'mah te'oreru es ha'ahava ad she'techpatz" [Shir HaShirim 8:4]. Rav Levi Yitzchak interprets this pasuk (homiletically) to mean that when a person is inspired (experiences hisorerus) he needs to concretize that inspiration, as symbolized by relating the word techpatz [literally desire] with the word chefetz [meaning object]. A person should take his inspiration and put it into something tangible, rather than letting it dissipate.

There are many times when we hear things or we go places or we participate in events that inspire us. Unfortunately, however, human nature is such that most of the time, nothing becomes of such inspiration. Whenever someone IS inspired, he should remember the teaching of "ad she'techpatz" and channel that inspiration into something concrete and physical. Accept upon yourself to give charity, to learn, to visit the sick — whatever it is — just do something!

**“Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to Me a portion, from every man whose heart will motivate him you shall take My portion” (25:2)**

The translation of Onkelos, which is the generally accepted translation, is to "separate" a donation, to give it. Why does the Torah use a language of "to take" a donation? It should say to "give" the donation?! The answer is that when a person gives, he is really also taking. Chazal tell us to realize that when we give charity, the poor are doing more for us than we are doing for the poor. When a poor man comes to ask for money, he provides the wealthy man with an opportunity to do a mitzvah. A person who is blessed with wealth should use it for mitzvos. If a person looks at the poor man and is thankful for the chance to use his money for a good purpose, he will approach the act of giving in a much different way. This is how the mitzvah of tzedaka is meant to be done. The person who is giving should not think that he is losing money. He really gains much more. In fact, the word נתן, to give, is a palindrome and can be read the same backwards and forward. This hints to the fact that what a person gives will undoubtedly come back to him in due time.

The Malbim offers another explanation. Everything that a person owns comes from Hashem. Only when a person does the right thing with what he has been given does he acquire the true right to take everything else that Hashem has given him. Thus, when a person gives, he is really taking as well because he acquires everything else that he has earned as his own. This is similar to the idea of blessings on food. When one makes a blessing on food, the food then becomes his to eat. The Gemara in Berachos 35a asks that two verses seem contradictory. One verse says that "To Hashem belongs the world and all that is in it," (Tehillim 24:1) while another verse says "And the land He gave to men" (ibid 115:16). The Gemara resolves the contradiction by stating that the world belongs to Hashem before one makes a blessing. The world belongs to man after he recites a blessing. When one makes a blessing on an item, it becomes his and he acquires the right to benefit from it.

R' Dovid MiKotzk quotes the posuk "For I have given you a good purchase, do not forsake my Torah" (Mishlei 4:2). Why, he asks, is the Torah referred to as a purchase, something that is taken? He answers that one must approach Torah study as a merchant approaches his wares. A merchant has merchandise to sell and, if he does not have anyone to sell to, he will not give up. He will come back the next day and try to sell it again. Torah is the same way. Sometimes, a person will have a day or a week where things do not go so well. He does not feel successful in his learning, he does not enjoy his learning or he is finding it difficult to understand his learning. When this happens, one should not despair. He should continue to try the next day and give it another go. He must treat Torah like merchandise that he must sell and should try again day after day.

**“They shall make an Ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its lengths; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height” (25:10)**

The Midrash Tanchuma, points out that when Hashem told Moshe to make the various vessels in the Mishkan, everything was commanded in singular form, taught to Moshe as an individual. The lone exception is the Aron, the command for which was given in plural, directed toward the nation as a whole. The reason for this is that every single individual has a share in the Torah, which is represented by the Aron. Therefore, the command to build it was directed to the community. Nobody can claim to have done more than his fellow for the Aron because everyone has an equal share in Torah. The Chofetz Chaim adds that the Torah is the property of all the Jewish people. The person who learns Torah has the same share in it as does the person who supports and strengthens Torah. Every person has a portion in it and each should strive to serve Hashem in his own way with the unique talents and abilities that Hashem gave him. No person can say that he does not have to learn Torah or know Torah. The Torah does not belong to a select few individuals. It is the possession of each member of the Jewish people.

**“You shall erect the Mishkan according to its manner, as you will have been shown at the mountain” (26:30)**

Why does the Torah go into great detail regarding the construction of the Mishkan, while many other important laws are only derived from implications and some only learned through the Oral Law? The Torah wants to emphasize that the idea of the Mishkan is to take the gold, silver and copper, the mundane materials of wealth, and to make them holy by using them to bring the Divine Presence into this world. In our everyday life, we can elevate our mundane possessions to a spiritual level. In the materialistic world that we live in, we can learn an important lesson from the construction of the Mishkan. We must seek to make the most of what we own and dedicate our possessions for a higher purpose. This is why the Torah goes into such detail about the construction of the Mishkan. This is not only true of our property but also of our mundane activities. Even the simplest, most physical things that we do every day can be raised to a higher level. When we eat, we should do so in order to rejuvenate ourselves to serve Hashem. When we sleep, we should have in mind that we want to wake up in the morning refreshed so that we can serve Hashem with a greater intensity. When we are on the road or on the subway, we can spend our time learning and elevate the simple act of going to school or work to a spiritual activity.

*by Rabbi Mayer Friedman*

## **Make Your Best Effort, and God Completes the Task**

*by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski*

*You shall make a Menorah of pure gold, hammered out shall the Menorah be made, its base, its shaft, its cups, its knobs and its blossoms shall be [hammered] from it# (25:31)*

Rashi calls our attention to the wording of this verse, which begins with “You shall make a Menorah,” but closes with “shall the Menorah be made.” The intricate elements of the Menorah were not to be made separately and then attached to it. Everything had to be hammered out from a single piece of gold.

Inasmuch as this was beyond human ability, God instructed Moses to put the gold ingots into the fire, and the Menorah emerged, fashioned by God. This is an important lesson. We are obligated to do what is right and proper and demanded of us, but we are not always able to bring things to completion. But this does not give us permission to sit back and do nothing. We must do whatever is within our ability to do and trust in God for a favorable outcome.

This is a delicate balance which is often ignored. Some people insist on doing everything themselves, refusing to accept the limitations of reality. They become frustrated when they cannot control everything, even when clear thinking indicates that there are things beyond one's control. On the other hand, some people who realize that they cannot control the outcome may sit back and do nothing. “What's the use?” they say. “I cannot make things turn out the way I want anyway.”

The Menorah teaches us the proper balance. We must do what we can. When we have made a sincere effort, it is then that God will help us bring it to completion. “God will bless you in all that you do” ([Deuteronomy 15:18](#)).

The Baal Shem Tov uses this concept to explain a rather puzzling verse in Psalms. “Yours, O God, is kindness, for you repay each man according to his deeds” ([Psalms 62:13](#)). If God rewards a person only according to his deeds, that is simply justice. In what way is this a kindness? The Baal Shem Tov says that a person only initiates the deed, but God brings it to completion, God rewards the person as if he had completed the entire deed himself. That is beyond what the person deserved, and that is a Divine kindness.

“You shall make” and “it shall be made.” The Menorah was a source of light. This lesson illuminates for us a proper path in life.

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## **Lighting Up the Table**

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg*

The menorah and the showbread table stood opposite each other in the outer chamber of the Tabernacle, and later of the Temple in Jerusalem: the menorah standing against the southern wall, and the table against the northern wall.

The menorah was kindled every afternoon, and remained lit throughout the night. The lights of the menorah symbolize the illumination provided by Torah and mitzvot: “For a mitzvah is a candle, and the Torah is light.” The spiritual illumination supplied by studying Torah and observing G-d’s commandments lights up the darkest and coldest nights. As Isaiah said, “For behold, darkness shall cover the earth . . . and the L-rd shall shine upon you.”

Every Shabbat twelve loaves of bread were placed on the table, where they remained until the following Shabbat. Bread is the staff of life, and a metaphor for all forms of nourishment. Thus, the table symbolizes all our material needs.

The Temple serves as the portal to heaven. As Jacob said regarding the Temple Mount: “This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of heaven.” This gateway serves a dual purpose: it is the path through which our prayers ascend to heaven, and it is the conduit through which we receive all beneficence which descends from Above. Both our spiritual and physical needs are provided by G-d, and both come to us via the Temple: the spiritual needs are channeled through the menorah, and material largess through the table.

The biblical commentator Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam), explains that the menorah’s practical purpose was to provide light for the table. After all, the royal table needs to be illuminated by a royal candelabrum!

The message is quite clear. Our Torah and mitzvot must “illuminate” all our physical pursuits. We cannot relegate the spiritual to the synagogue, or to the hour or two of the day which we dedicate to Torah study, prayer and good deeds. Our connection with G-d must be apparent even while involved in a business meeting, or when sitting down to eat. A home whose “table” is illuminated by its “menorah” is truly worthy of being a sanctuary wherein G-d willingly dwells.

## **The Charity Solution**

*by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt*

A poor man once came to my house, and my first wife (a"h) answered the door. She was very suspicious of the story he told, but at the same time, didn't want to send away someone in need. So she gave him a small amount. He took the money, but said he was starving as he hadn't eaten in days and needed more money to buy some food. My wife, ever the resourceful one, said that if he waited just a minute she would make him some sandwiches. He said that he didn't want sandwiches, he wanted money! She said that surely if he was starving, sandwiches would be better. At that point, he left in search of greener pastures. He was starving, but clearly not starving enough to want to eat!

When the Jewish people, in this week's portion, are asked to donate funds for the Tabernacle, they are not asked for money. Rather, they are asked for materials - gold, silver, bronze, cloth, wood, etc.

I think this and the story with my wife illustrate the same principle: When giving charity, it is very easy to write a check and say goodbye. The Torah tells us that this is not what charity should be about. Charity is not about giving money; it is about solving problems: It is about taking responsibility.

God tells the Jewish people: Don't write your charity checks out to Moses and expect him to go shopping with the money. The Tabernacle is your responsibility as much as it is his. Figure out what is needed and bring it. Similarly, when a man who is starving comes to your door, don't give him money and make him go off to buy food - give him a meal. When a man needs \$10,000 for an operation, don't give him \$1000 and send him off to find the rest. Call nine of your friends and solve the problem. Charity is not just about "lightening the burden" that another is carrying; it is about taking the burden away.

Another mistake people make is to think: If I'm not wealthy, I can't give charity. Money is a small part of what we have to give to charity. Time, energy, support, love and friendship usually mean a great deal more. In addition to giving 10% of our income to help others, we should also give 10% of our time.

When involved in my very unfavorable activity of fundraising, I often tell people that the problems of the Jewish community are yours, just as much as they are mine. Don't write me a check and say goodbye. I won't let you get off the hook that easy! Get involved and work to solve the problems of the Jewish community alongside me. Charity is about taking personal responsibility for a problem. Whether giving a starving man food, or providing materials for the Tabernacle. It's not just about money. It's about solutions.

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## **Like a Good Neighbor**

*By Sheldon Stern*

Many popular songs are covered by other artists. Occasionally, there's a rendition which adds a dimension to the original and it's transformative. Jimi Hendrix's version of Dylan's, "All Along the Watchtower" immediately comes to mind. Along those lines I'd like to put a new spin on an oft repeated Dvar Torah from this week's Parsha. In Exodus 25:8, Hashem instructs Moshe, "Have them build Me a Mikdash (Sanctuary) and I shall dwell (Shochanti) among them." The Rabbi remarks, "We would expect the verse to say, "I shall dwell within it?" So Rashi tells us that G-d dwells within each and every Jew. But let's take this in a different direction. The word employed for "I shall dwell" "Shochanti" is also cognate with "Shechinah" (Divine Presence) and "Shochein" (Neighbor) We can thus reread the Posuk as follows, "Have them build Me a Mikdash, and I (Divine Presence) will be a neighbor to them." To borrow from the Broadway hit "Evita" Hashem was saying, "You keep the Torah I'll keep My distance."

But we must explain this separation. Someone once approached Rabbi Miller, "Rebbe, you always tell us that a person has to attain Shleimus, (perfection), so I'd like you to observe me and correct whatever mistakes I make." The great Marbitz Torah responded, "You wouldn't last five minutes." So we advance a Kal V'Chomer; If one can't handle human scrutiny, how much moreso to be in Hashem's crucible given that He sees not only our actions but even our thoughts? But let's take a deeper dive into the subject. Can anyone discern whether Hashem is actually within us or if He is, as Bette Midler sang, "Watching Us From a Distance?" So there's an important Rashi in Parshas Mishpatim. Verse 22:2 rules that if a Baal Habayis catches someone tunneling under his house, he's permitted to kill the offender. The next Posuk, however, says, "But if the sun shines on him, then the homeowner would be guilty of bloodshed." Rashi comments that the Torah is speaking metaphorically, i.e. it's saying that if it's clear to you that the "intruder" has no intent to do physical harm, then you can't kill him. With this Rashi opens our eyes to the way we should address the Torah. Learning Pshat is an art and a science. One must develop a Chush, a feel. Sometimes you follow the "plain" Pshat and sometimes you don't. As per the Outback Steakhouse commercial, "No Rules Just Right." This gives us leeway to interpret using our logical skills. Applying that mantra Hashem could've put us all in Shtetls run by autocratic, dogmatic but well intentioned Rabbis. Yes we'd conform, but we might not

believe. As the late, great historian Rabbi Berel Wein said, "The commitment of the European Jew was a mile wide and an inch deep." He said this to explain why so many ostensibly frum Jews dumped their Tefilin overboard upon reaching these shores. This, then is one possible intent of Exodus 33:20, "No man can see Me and live." Hashem understands that we need some space, Lebensraum, if you will. He much prefers that we serve Him out of love than out of fear. But at no time does Hashem forget us. As Jake from Statefarm might say, "Like a Good Neighbor Hashem is There." When does He come to our assistance? Let's turn to Simon and Garfunkel's masterpiece, "Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water," "When you're weary feeling small, when tears are in your eyes I will dry them all. I'm on your side, oh when times get rough." Or, as the Roman poet, Quintus Ennius said, "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

So this is how Hashem relates to us, but how should we reciprocate? Rabbi Miller was wont to say with regard to his method of teaching Talmud, "It's my job to take out the bumps, and it's yours to put them back in." What does that mean? Rabbi Mordechai Feinstein once told me that the Gemara is multilayered so that a ten year old can learn a piece on one level and think he understands it, but when he revisits it at 18, this time with Tosafos, it looks like a totally new subject. So Rabbi Miller was saying that he omits certain difficulties e.g. Rashi's statement here, seems to be contradicted by another statement elsewhere, but the diligent student is charged with reintroducing them. It therefore follows that if Hashem separates Himself from us, we should essay to come closer to Him.

Chazal say that a person should "kill himself" when learning Torah. That means he should keep digging deeper and deeper as this effort ultimately brings him closer to Hashem who is One with the Torah. But one must tread cautiously. I reference my former Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Dr. Zelig Friedman quite often, and I'll always have a warm place in my heart for him, but there was another Rabbi Friedman, Moshe ZTL, who also deserves his props. I befriended him in Brighton Beach when I was undergoing my religious transformation and he told me, "Don't go overboard with the religion." He was echoing Shlomo Hamelech in Koheles 7:16, but somehow it hit home when I heard it from him. I'll share a story to make my point. About 30 years ago I attended my cousin's wedding at a wedding hall in Brooklyn. When I arrived I was greeted by a local (Lower East Side) Rebbitzin who told me, "I came to the wedding, but I won't eat anything here, because it's not kosher enough for me." The Yetzer hora is adept at taking those who become overly fastidious in a particular area of Halacha and convincing them that they now have license to ignore Mitzvos Bein Adam Lemakom.

To this point we've discussed the relationship between Hashem and His children, but at least as important is how we relate to each other. There's an episode of Seinfeld in which the show's looniesttune, Cosmo Kramer, decides to photograph all the residents of their Manhattan apartment building. He then writes each person's name under the picture and posts it in the lobby. Chaos ensues, because the denizens don't want to be "friends." Yes, when they share an elevator they'll nod to each other, but that's it. Kramer's innovation was seen, understandably, as an invasion of their personal space. Rav Reuvein Feinstein once offered this insight, "Hashem created the Daf Yomi because of skyscrapers." He elaborated, "People used to live in buildings that were up to ten stories." So when you enter the elevator, a cursory good morning followed by I hope it doesn't rain will likely get you to your desired destination." But that won't work if you live on the 60th floor. Not to worry. "Oh I see you're holding a Gemara do you do the Daf?" "I'm trying but it's hard." Before you know it you're there. U2 sang in its great "Where the Streets Have No Name" "I want to run I want to hide, I want to tear down the walls that keep me inside." We all have to overcome our innate shyness and reach out to our neighbors who need religious coaching. Moreover, we must always be receptive to those we meet. Torah is the great equalizer. I learn while going to and from work and people often interrupt me to ask what I'm doing. I always shut the Gemara, because I don't believe in accidents. If this person approached me, that was orchestrated from Above and I'm obligated to give him (and sometimes her) my rapt attention. Helping another Jew is beneficial to both the recipient and the benefactor.