

Parshas Terumah begins with a puzzling couple of verses:

דָּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָקָחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְכָּנוּ לְבוֹ תִּקְחוּ אֶת תְּרוּמֹתַי: זֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֵתֵם זֶהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנְחֹשֶׁת:

The pesukim talk about 'taking' donations. But it should have been written differently: Klal Yisroel should be instructed to 'give' donations. Why instruct them to only 'take' donations and not 'give' donations?

For background, we need to understand why a Mishkon was necessary in the first place. At Har Sinai, there is fire and smoke and a piercing shofar sound – everyone is frightened. The people ask Moshe to convey the Torah to them instead. They can't endure Hashem speaking to them directly. It is too intense.

The vision of Hashem's presence on Har Sinai is overwhelming. Only Moshe Rabbeinu is able to ascend the mountain. Klal Yisroel were given an opportunity to hear Hashem's voice at Har Sinai because Hashem raised them to an incredible level. They achieved a level of nevuah higher than any other novi besides Moshe Rabbeinu. A human being on that level is able to perceive ruchniyus as if it is tangible. It is as real to him as physical objects are real to us. Our physical bodies sense other physical objects with their physical senses but we can't experience ruchniyus directly. Our neshomos' perception of ruchniyus is blocked by being within our body.

But Moshe Rabbeinu's body did not put up any barriers to his neshomo. He purified his body to the extent that his neshomo could experience a full, direct connection with Hashem while he was conscious. Klal Yisroel at Har Sinai reached one level below this level of Moshe Rabbeinu for a few brief hours and couldn't tolerate it. They soon asked to come down to a lower level like they were at Kriyas Yam Suf – while only Moshe remained on that highest level to receive the Torah.

After the last forty days, Moshe Rabbeinu comes down with the second luchos and instructs Klal Yisroel to make a Mishkon. Why?

There is an important Ramban which explains as follows:

The same level of Shechinoh that was manifest at Har Sinai has to be continually available to Klal Yisroel. There has to be a place in their midst where they can feel a tangible presence of Hashem on an ongoing basis. So Hashem instructs them to make a Mikdosh so He can dwell among them – inside each and every Jew's heart – wherever they travel.

But Klal Yisroel have to build the Mishkon with their materials – some of what they got from all the wealth they were given when they left Egypt. But are they just giving away their wealth for nothing? Or are they really getting Hashem's presence and a close connection? This idea is hard for some people to fathom – the giving is really taking.

And they have to give willingly and give it l'shem shomayim – only then will they receive the connection with Hashem in return.

Klal Yisroel, at different times in their history, had the opportunity to connect to Hashem at different levels.

After a year of the ten makkos, Klal Yisroel were ready to connect to Hashem and feel His presence in a tangible way. So on the night of makkas bechoros, after all the preparation that Klal Yisroel made with the korbon Pesach and the bris miloh, they received a gilui Shechinoh.

Seven days later, at Kriyas Yam Suf, they go to a higher level of nevuah. And finally, at the bottom of Har Sinai they are made to go even

higher. But, Klal Yisroel say they can't tolerate this level for long. Bring us down!

Hashem agrees to their request, but in return, He tells them to make a Mishkon, and eventually a Mikdosh. There has to be a place where Klal Yisroel can always achieve a connection to Hashem on the highest level. And once that intense presence is established here on Earth, the impact of that presence is felt everywhere else on some level.

The Mishkon and Mikdosh don't run on automatic. Klal Yisroel have to sustain that presence of Shechinoh with their level of kedushoh and taharoh. The Nefesh HaChaim quotes a very important Zohar which says when the time came for the churbon Beis HaMikdosh, it was thought to be impossible. If any Jew who wasn't allowed in there dared to come in, he would die on the spot! How could non-Jews walk in and destroy it?

The Zohar answers that by the time Nevuchadnezer and his army came in, the churbon was already complete. It was like they were grinding already-ground flour. This means that the kedushoh of the Shechinoh had already left the Mikdosh, due to the low level of Klal Yisroel at the time of the churbon.

The level of intensity of kedushoh in the Mikdosh reflects the relationship Klal Yisroel have with Hashem. If the relationship is good, the kedushoh is strong and it will repel all invaders. If the relationship is weak then it won't be protected. So by the time the churbon happened, Klal Yisroel effectively removed all the kedushoh in the Mikdosh and it was completely exposed to attack and destruction.

But does that mean we can no longer connect to Hashem?

No. Every time we lose a level of connection, we are told that we can regain it with limud Torah.

In the final nevuah of Malachi, where Hashem is saying this is the last direct communication through a novi, Hashem tells us: זָכַר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עֲבָדִי. Through Torah, you can regain what is being lost.

In Megillas Eichoh, Yirmiyahu Hanovi describes the churbon and the resulting distance that was created between us and Hashem, but he also says: קוּמִי רוּנִי בְּלִילָה לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֶׁמֹּרוֹת, שְׁפִי כַמִּים לִיבֶךְ נֹכַח פְּנֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם. The gemara Tomid explains that when you learn Torah intensely at night, you can once again be השָׁמַיִם.

Another gemara tells us that we can make a מִקְדָּשׁ מֵעַט even in golus by building מִדְרָשׁוֹת וּבְתֵי כְנִסְיֹת וּבְתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת. The Shechinoh – on some level – can still be felt in these places. They are designated to connect to Hashem through tefillah, and even more in limud Torah.

Rabbeinu Bachyei writes in his introduction to Parshas Terumah that we need to grab onto mitzvos with zrizus. And the best mitzvah to grab onto is limud Torah:

קָחוּ מוֹסְרֵי וְאֵל כֶּסֶף וְדַעַת מִחֲרוֹץ נִבְחַר (משלי ח', י). שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ עָ"ה זָהִיר בְּכֹאֵן (משלי ח') אֶת הָאָדָם עַל מִדַּת הַזְרִיזוֹת שִׁישְׁתַּדֵּל וְיִטְרַח בְּמוֹסְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה וְאֵל יִשְׁתַּדֵּל וְיִטְרַח בְּרֹבֵי הַכֶּסֶף, לְפִי שֶׁבְּמוֹסְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה יִקְנֶה הָאָדָם תּוֹעֵלוֹת רַבּוֹת בְּעוֹה"ז וּבְעוֹה"ב וּרְבִי הַכֶּסֶף אֵין בּוֹ תּוֹעֵלָת אֲבָל יֵשׁ בּוֹ נֹזְקִים וּמְכַשׁוּלִים רַבִּים שֶׁהוּא סָבֵה לְדַאגוֹת רַבּוֹת וְכִמוֹ שֶׁאֲמָרוּ רַז"ל מִרְבֵּה נִכְסִים מִרְבֵּה דַאגָּה. וְיָדוּעַ שֶׁאֵין בְּכָל הַרְבִּיּוּי שֶׁבְּכָל הַמְדוּת שׁוֹם תּוֹעֵלָת כִּי אִם בְּרֹבֵי הַתּוֹרָה. וְדַעַת מִחֲרוֹץ נִבְחַר, טַעְמוֹ וְקָחוּ דַעַת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁהוּא מִחֲרוֹץ נִבְחַר.

Limud Torah is the means we have today to connect to Hashem. This is our מִקְדָּשׁ מֵעַט. This is why the kedushoh of a Beis Midrash is higher

than the kedushoh of a Beis Knesses. Tefilloh is one way to connect to Hashem, but limud Torah is a higher way.

We have an interesting minhag – to blow the shofar in shul in the location where we read the Torah. We want to combine the zechus of tekias shofar with the zechus of limud Torah to make it as powerful as it can be.

We have to realize that when we walk into a Beis Midrash, we are walking into a mokom kodosh. You need to be dressed properly, and you need to conduct yourself with the proper decorum. There is a Mi Shebeirach that you can find in some siddurim, written by the Tosfos Yom Tov to bless those who refrain from talking in shul. Why?

The Tosfos Yom Tov lived through the horrible massacres of Tach v'Tat. They came to him to ask what aveirah was committed by the Polish Jewish community to bring this on? You have to understand that Poland at the time was the center of Yiddishkeit. All the great meforshim of Shulchan Aruch came from this community. The Shach, the Taz, the Sma, and Mogen Avrohom were all written during this era. It was the golden age of Polish Jewry.

The Tosfos Yom Tov came to the conclusion that the cause of this tragedy was the lack of kovod given to a Beis Knesses and Beis Midrash, by talking devorim beteilim! He is telling us that a Beis Midrash and Beis Knesses is a special place where you connect to Hashem through tefilloh and limud Torah. You have to enter with the proper attitude of reverence. But if you treat it as place to meet and socialize, schmoozing about the latest news and politics, you don't understand what this place is about.

The true beneficiary of a mokom kedushoh where the Shechinoh is felt, is Klal Yisroel themselves. They are donating, but they are receiving something so much more valuable in return.

There is a frightening Chazal which says that every generation that does not have a Beis HaMikdosh built, it is as if the Beis HaMikdosh was destroyed in that generation. It means that the destruction of the Beis HaMikdosh is a result of a lack of kedushoh and mitzvos. If there would be sufficient kedushoh in this world to sustain a Beis HaMikdosh now, the Beis HaMikdosh would immediately appear. The very fact that there isn't a Beis HaMikdosh standing right now is because we don't have the necessary kedushoh to sustain it. Even if we did physically build it, it would be immediately destroyed. We infuse the kedushoh

and we diminish the kedushoh.

We need to treat our mekomos of kedushoh with the highest level of respect and seriousness. The place where you combine your davening and learning has the highest level of kedushoh you can create in this world. It is an opportunity to have your tefillos accepted in the best possible way. But we take the existence of so many shuls and yeshivos for granted. Hashem gave an unbelievable gift to our generation to mold ourselves according to the Torah.

This past Shabbos, we read Parshas Shekolim about the donation of the machtzis hashekel. Why are we reading it, if we don't give this money today? It is because we are getting ourselves ready that at any moment the Beis HaMikdosh might be built and we will have to donate money for the korbonos. But why do we want a Beis HaMikdosh in the first place? To be a national symbol to swear in soldiers in front of it? We want it to be a place to connect to Hashem on the deepest, most intense level.

When the Beis Halevi left Volozhin, he became the Rov of the city of Slutsk. He got into a fight with the leading baalebatim about how to deal with the Russian draft. The Russians gave quotas, and the rich families didn't want their sons being used to fill the quotas. The Beis Halevi insisted that there can be no class discrimination. He left the city with deep disappointment over how he was treated and was no longer interested in rabbonus.

Soon afterwards Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin left for Eretz Yisroel and the community of Brisk insisted the Beis Halevi become their rov. They told him the 25,000 Jews of the town are waiting for him. So the Beis Halevi relented and agreed. He couldn't keep 25,000 Jews waiting.

The Chofetz Chaim heard this story and sighed, "if Rav Yosef Ber wasn't able to keep 25,000 Jews waiting, then certainly the Moshiach wouldn't tarry if 25,000 Jews would sincerely be waiting for him." The problem is that waiting for Moshiach is more than a slogan. It means you want the Shechinoh to be in your midst and you need to maintain a very high level of kedushoh and taharoh in your life. The hard truth is that not many people are waiting for that kind of life.

We need to internalize the opportunities we have. When you give, you get much more in return. But it never comes automatically. You need to make the effort. Let's make that effort in the month we have left to finish the zman properly.