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Give or Take

Parashat Terumah opens with the striking phrase: “וַיִּקְחָה לְיַדְךָ” — *Take a contribution for Me.*

Rashi explains: הַפְּרָשָׁה – יִפְרִישׁוּ לִי מִמְּמוּנֵם – *the treasurers were to take what the people themselves set aside from their possessions as a voluntary donation.*

Many commentators are puzzled by the Torah’s choice of language. Why does the Torah say — “take” or “set aside” — rather than the more obvious — “give”? What matters most is the act of giving, not merely the intention or designation.

The **Chayei Moshe** offers a beautiful insight, rooted in a teaching from **Pirkei Avot**. The Mishnah states: “הַרְחֵץ לְמִצְוָה קָלָה” — *Run toward even a simple mitzvah* (Avot 4:2).

What does it mean to “run” toward a mitzvah?

Whenever we perform a mitzvah, the object itself — the lulav, the menorah, the matzah — was ultimately provided by Hashem. The physical means are not truly ours. What *does* originate from us is something else entirely: **the enthusiasm, the eagerness, the desire to fulfill Hashem’s will.** Running toward a mitzvah expresses that inner fire, the personal excitement we bring to divine service.

ENTHUSIASM TO DONATE

This idea is especially relevant to *tzedakah*, or donating to the Mishkan. Everything

we possess — our livelihood, our resources — is given to us by Hashem, not only for our own needs, but with an added portion meant to be shared. When a person sets aside money for charity *before* being asked, it demonstrates more than generosity; it reflects enthusiasm. It shows readiness, anticipation, and joy in fulfilling the mitzvah.

Perhaps this is why the Midrash connects the contributions to the Mishkan — described with the word וַיִּקְחָה — to the declaration of נעשה ונשמע in the previous parashah. Just as Bnei Yisrael expressed their willingness to accept the mitzvot before fully understanding them, so too the Torah expects us to set aside our contributions willingly, without inner resistance or hesitation. The challenge is not merely to give, but to overcome the natural difficulty of parting with what we perceive as “hard-earned” money — and instead designate it with clarity and joy.

“THE MONEY IS NOT MINE”

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in **Darash Moshe**, adds a profound dimension. The word נַחַת suggests that one is taking the donation from something that does not truly belong to him. It is as if the giver is merely transferring funds from one place to another — from where they were entrusted to him, to where they are now needed.

This perspective fundamentally changes the experience of giving. If our *parnassah* is a gift from Hashem, then the portion we give to *tzedakah* was never fully ours to begin with. It was designated for others.

Recognizing this makes generosity less painful and far more natural — an act of faithful stewardship rather than sacrifice.

MA'ASER BEHEMAM: NINE FOR ME

This idea is powerfully illustrated in the mitzvah of **ma'aser behemah**. One might expect that the Torah would simply require separating ten percent of one's animals. Instead, the animals pass one by one through a narrow gate, and every tenth animal is declared holy.

Why this process? Because psychologically, the owner experiences the reality that **for every nine animals he keeps, only one is given away**. The focus is not on what is lost, but on what remains. The Torah trains us to see blessing, not deprivation.

Perhaps this is the deeper message of ייקחו. Hashem is not asking us to give up what is ours, but to recognize what was never truly ours to begin with. Life itself, our abilities, our success — all are entrusted to us, not owned by us.

When we approach mitzvot with enthusiasm, when we set aside before we are asked, when we give with the awareness that we are partners in something greater than ourselves — then we are no longer losing. We are gaining clarity, purpose, and connection.

May we merit to “run” toward mitzvot, to recognize Hashem’s blessings in our lives, and to share them generously and joyfully. In doing so, we transform not only our resources, but ourselves — from reluctant givers into willing builders of sanctity, just as our ancestors did when they built the Mishkan. ■

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