

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XIX: Terumah (Ex. 25:1–27:19)

Essay 2. Making the Torah our property

מִדְרָשׁ רַבָּה "וַיִּקְחוּ לִי תְרוּמָה" הָדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב "כִּי לָקַח טוֹב נְתַתִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי "אֶל-תְּעֹזְבוּ". קוּשָׁה מְאִי קָא מְשַׁמַּע לוֹ, וְמָה עָנְנָו זֶה לְזֶה. וְנִישׁ לּוֹמֵר שֶׁהַמִּדְרָשׁ הַרְגִישׁ בְּפָסוּק זֶה קוּשָׁא, וְכֵן הַרְגִישׁ קוּשָׁא זֶה נְמִי בְּפָסוּק "כִּי לָקַח טוֹב" וְכֵן, וּבְתִירוּץ פָּסוּק זֶה שֶׁל "וַיִּקְחוּ לִי" נִתְרַץ נְמִי הַפָּסוּק שֶׁל "כִּי לָקַח טוֹב". וְהַקּוּשָׁא הַיָּדוּשָׁה לּוֹ לּוֹמֵר "וַיִּתְּנוּ לִי תְרוּמָה" וְמָה הוּא הַלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל "וַיִּקְחוּ". וְכֵן נְמִי "כִּי לָקַח טוֹב נְתַתִּי" הִנֵּה לּוֹ לּוֹמֵר "כִּי מִתָּן טוֹב נְתַתִּי לָכֶם", שֶׁהָרִי "נְתַתִּי" הוּא לְשׁוֹן מִתְּנָה "וְלָקַח" הוּא לְשׁוֹן לְקִיחָה הַנֶּאֱמָר בְּמַקְחָ וּמִמְכָר, וְאַם אוֹמֵר "לָקַח" הִנֵּה לּוֹ לּוֹמֵר "מְכַרְתִּי".

There is a **Midrash Rabbah**:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, **that they take** [וַיִּקְחוּ] [*ve'yikchu*] **for Me an offering**; of every man whose heart maketh him willing ye shall take My offering.”¹

This is the meaning of that which is written, “For a good acquisition [וְלָקַח] [*lekach*] **have I given** [נְתַתִּי] [*natati*] **to you; do not forsake my Torah** [i.e., my teaching].”²

- Ex. Rabbah 33:1

A difficulty is what is this coming to tell us? And what is the relationship of this to that?

It can be said that the Midrash senses a difficulty in this first verse, “that they take for Me an offering,” and also senses this same difficulty in the verse “For a good acquisition I have given to you.” In solving the verse of “that they take” we will also solve the verse of “For a good acquisition I have given to you.”

The difficulty is that it should have said “that they give [וַיִּתְּנוּ] [*ve'yitnu*] **to Me an offering,” for what is the reason for the language of “that they take”** [וַיִּקְחוּ] [*ve'yikchu*]?

Similarly, regarding “For a good acquisition [וְלָקַח] [*lekach*] **I have given to you,” it should have said, “For a good present** [מִתָּן] [*matan*] **I have given** [נְתַתִּי] [*natati*] **to you.”** I.e., there appears to be a disagreement between the verb and the object, **because the verb *natati*, “I have given,” is the language of a gift, while *lekach* is the language of acquisition, as it is discussed in the context of buying and selling. Since it instead says “*lekach*” in the beginning of the verse, it should have said “I have sold” in the second part of the verse, you have acquired and I have sold.**

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¹ Ex. 25:2.

² Prov. 4:2.

ובתירוץ הפסוק של "ויקחו־לי" יש לומר כהא דאמרין טוב מזה ומזה כל שאינו נודר כל עקר, אלא כמו שהיו עושים חסידים הראשונים שהיו מביאים כבשות לעזרה ושם היו נודרים ומקדישים אותה כדי שלא יבואו לידי מעילה כדאמרין פירק קמא דנדרים ופירק קמא דחולין (דף ב'), ולכן אמר הפתוב פשיטנו התרומה לא ידרו בה תחלה ואחר כך ישלמו הנדר, אלא מתחלה יפרישו אותה ואחר כך יקראו עליה שם נדבה, "ויקחו" דמשמע בידם ואחר כך יאמרו "לי תרומה".

In explaining the verse, “Take for Me,” it can be said as it was stated: “As it is taught [in a *Baraita*]: “Better that you should not vow [than that you should vow and not pay].”³ Better than [both] this and that [is one] who does not take a vow at all.”⁴ Rather, like the early pious ones, they would bring their lambs to the Temple courtyard and there they would vow and consecrate them, so that they would not be misappropriated, as it is said in the first chapter of tractate *Nedarim*⁵ and in the first chapter of tractate *Chulin* (page 2b).

Therefore, the verse says that when they give the donation, they should not first vow and then fulfill the vow, but rather, they should first set it aside and then call it a voluntary offering. “Take” implies that they take it in hand and then afterward say, “For Me a donation.”

ועל דרך זה מתפרש אף הפסוק "כי לקח טוב", שמתחלה התורה אינה מתנה אלא צריך ללוקחה, ואחר שלקחה אז נתונה במתנה, דאמרין פירק קמא דעבודת ה' ובהתחלה התורה נקראת על שמו של הקב"ה ולבסוף נקראת על שם שלו, שנאמר "כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה" וכו', בתחלה "תורת ה'" ולבסוף "ובתורתו".

In this way, the verse, “For a good acquisition I have given to you” is also explained, that initially, the Torah is not a gift, but has to be taken, i.e., through diligent learning. After it was taken, then it was given as a present. This is as it is said by Rava in the first chapter of tractate *Avodah Zarah*:

At first the Torah is called by the name of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and in the end, it is called by the name [of one who studies it]. This is as it is written, “For the teaching of [תורת] [*Torat*] the L-rd is the delight [of he who studies it], and in the teaching of [that person] [תורתו] [*Torato*] he studies day and night.”⁶

- *Avodah Zarah* 19a

³ Eccl. 5:4.

⁴ *Nedarim* 9a.

⁵ *Nedarim* 9b: “As it is taught [in a *Baraita*]: They said about Hillel the Elder that no person misused his burnt-offering in his lifetime. [Rather than consecrating it in advance,] he would bring it when it was unconsecrated to [the Temple] courtyard and consecrate it, and [then immediately] place his hand on it and slaughter it. [Thus, there was no opportunity to misuse it.]”

⁶ Ps. 1:2.

והטעם הוא כדאמרין התם בעבודת זרה לעולם ליגרוס איניש אף על גב דמשכח ואף על גב דלא ידע מאי קאמר, ועיי"ש בפרש ר"ש"י שמתחלה אין אדם יודע לתרץ מדעתו הקושיות וצריך לטרום הרבה, ואחר כך מעצמו יודע לתרץ, לפיכך מתחלה נקראת על שמו של הקב"ה שאינה שלו ואחר כך שיודע לתרץ היא שלו ונקראת על שמו, וזהו שפסיים "תורת"י אל-תעזבו" אף על פי שמתחלה כשנקראת "תורת"י היא קשה לכם, שצריך הרבה טורח, אפלו הכי "אל-תעזבו" אותה, שאחר הטורח יבא המנוחה.

The reason is as we say there in Avodah Zarah (19a): “A person should always study even though he forgets, and even though he does not understand what it is saying.” See there the explanation of Rashi, that initially a person doesn’t understand how to solve the difficulties and needs to strive, but afterward, he knows how to solve them by himself. Therefore, initially [the Torah] is called by the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, for it is not [the possession] of [the person], and afterward when he knows how to solve the difficulties, [the Torah] is [the person’s] and is called by his name.

This is the reason that [Solomon] concludes “do not forsake My Torah.” Even though initially, when it is called “my Torah,” it is difficult for you and requires a lot of effort, nevertheless, “do not forsake it,” because after the effort, a relaxing break will come.

ועוד יש לומר שהטעם שמתחלה התורה נקראת על שמו של הקב"ה, שהרי אם היתה התורה שלנו מתחלה, אם לא היינו עוסקים בה היינו נקראים מועלים בהקדש, שהרי היתה לנו כמו נדר והיינו חייבים לעסוק בה ולא היתה, תקומה לעמי הארצות. משום הכי היתה לנו בבחירתנו אם אנו רוצים ליגע בה וללקחה מנדבת לבנו, אז נותנה לנו במתנה.

Furthermore, it can be said that the reason that initially, the Torah was called by the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is because, if the Torah were initially considered ours, then if we had not occupied ourselves with it, we would be considered to have misappropriated consecrated property. That is, it would have been as though we had consecrated it like a vow, and we would have been obligated to occupy ourselves with it.

There would not have been any redemption for the ignorant. This is why we were given a choice if we wanted to labor in it and take it, through the generosity of our hearts, and then it was given to us as a gift, and called our property.

ובזה יובן שפיר הקשר של המדרש הטעם שאמר "ויקחו-לי" ולא אמר "וינתנו-לי" היינו כדי שלא יבאו לידי מעילה, אם כן זה הטעם של הפסוק "כי לקח טוב" וכו', שמתחלה קראת "לקח" כדי שלא תהיה עלינו לשם נדר, אבל אחר שלמדנו אותה והיא שלנו אי אפשר שנבוא לידי מעילה, שהרי כתיב "אזלת אהבים ונצלת-חן" שמעלה חן על לומדיה, ועוד אמרו יותר ממה שהעגל רוצה לינק פרה רוצה להניק.

With this, the connection of the Midrash between the giving of donations and the acquisition of the Torah is understood well. The reason it says “that they take for Me” and not “and they shall give Me” is so that they do not come to transgress the law against misappropriating consecrated property. Therefore, this is the reason for the verse “For a good acquisition I have given to you; do not forsake my Torah,” that initially, it was called “an

acquisition,” because it will not be ours until we commit to it, **so that it would not be considered a vow upon us.**

But after we have learned it and it is ours, then it is impossible for us to come to transgression, for it is written, “A loving doe, a graceful mountain goat,”⁷ which is interpreted by the Gemara as meaning that the Torah bestows grace upon those who learn it.⁸ Also, it is said, “More than the calf desires to suck, the cow desires to nurse.”⁹

וְנִהְיֶה הַטַּעַם שֶׁל תַּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים שֶׁנִּגְגוּת נַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם כְּזִדְוֹנוֹת וְלַעַם הָאֲרֶז הַזְּדוֹנוֹת נַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם כְּשִׁגְגוֹת, לְפִי שֶׁלַעַם הָאֲרֶז אֵין לָהֶם חַיִּיב כָּל כֶּךָ לְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה, שֶׁאֶפִּילוֹ קָרָא קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שְׁחֲרִית וְעֶרְבִית, קִיּוֹם מְצוּוֹת "לֹא־יִמוּשׁ" וְכוּ'.

This is the reason that for Torah scholars, unintentional transgressions are considered as deliberate sins, while for the unlearned people, deliberate sins are considered as unintentional transgressions.¹⁰ This is because the unlearned people are not as obligated to study Torah, so even if they recite only the Shema in the morning and evening, they fulfill the commandment of “Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it.”¹¹

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⁷ Prov. 5:19.

⁸ Eruvin 54b.

⁹ Pesachim 112a.

¹⁰ Bava Metzia 33b.

¹¹ Joshua 1:8; Menachot 99b.