



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

Parashat Terumah **Obligation or Contribution?**

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Be'eri

Parashat Terumah begins with the commandment of the Jewish people to contribute to the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Rashi explains that in effect there were three funding campaigns, two of which were for obligatory contributions (funding for public sacrifices and for the silver sockets), while only the third one was completely voluntary, with the latter's contributions being subject to the discretion of every individual donor (the third campaign was designated for collecting the materials necessary for the construction of the Mishkan).

When considering which of the aforementioned contributions is of a more elevated nature, our natural inclination is to say that a voluntary contribution is greater and more meaningful than a contribution that is forced upon us, since the former is reflective of the goodness of one's heart. Giving of one's self demonstrates love for the mitzvah to the extent that one is willing to go beyond what is commanded of him or her. Such a contribution certainly cannot be compared to one of an obligatory nature. Nevertheless, the MaHRaL of Prague (16 century), in his treatise Gur Arieh, is of the opposite opinion. He argues that it is the involuntary contribution that transcends the voluntary. Based on what we said above, this assertion is somewhat surprising.

In order to provide explanation, we would mention a similar question, albeit in another context, that appears in the Talmud (Kiddushin 31a). The Talmud tells of Rav Yosef who was blind and thus exempt from all of the mitzvot. Nevertheless, Rav Yosef made a point of fulfilling the mitzvot anyway. After fulfilling a mitzvah, he would rejoice at having performed a mitzvah from which he was exempt. The Talmud relates that once Rav Yosef dove deeper into the matter he understood that he had been mistaken and that "greater is the one who is commanded and fulfills than he who is not commanded and fulfills." For this reason, his reward was in fact smaller than the reward of someone who performed mitzvot out of obligation. On the surface, this principle is difficult to wrap our heads around. One would think that someone who goes beyond his obligation demonstrates a greater love for the fulfillment of Hashem's mitzvot. Why, then, does such a person merit less of a reward than someone who performs mitzvot out of obligation? The Tosafot in Kiddushin explain that contrary to our initial thought, it is in fact more difficult to fulfill the mitzvot out of a sense of obligation than out of a sense of desire. When a person is obligated to fulfill a mitzvah he is in effect subject to a yoke; in other words, he or she is subject to an obligation which, if avoided, would result in a sin. The very sense of concern for fulfilling the obligation transforms the mitzvah into a quality of greater complexity. On the other hand, someone who performs a mitzvah from which he or she is exempt exists in a more relaxed state, one that lacks concern. He or she may merit the reward for performance, but if the alternative path is chosen there would be no repercussion. In this way, it is easier for such a person to fulfill the mitzvot.



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Our world is built upon a complex construction of personal rights and obligations. Every element of society subjects its members to a variety of different obligations: the public domain, the work place, the home and the family. Humanity has debated over and over the question of whether it is preferable to remove the obligations from its members and to depend on the inherently good nature of man and his ingrained duty to preserve himself and his neighbor, or whether it is better to subject man to a system of laws and regulations. We all know that this question has been resolved by choosing the latter, as legal systems have been deemed necessary to create a structure and framework for human activity. The principles that arise from this week's parasha reflect a similar understanding of human nature, as the Torah presents obligatory contributions alongside optional donations for the construction of the Mishkan. This overall construction, which combines both the obligatory and the personal desire, is what creates a positive human existence.

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