

Take from yourselves a terumah, portion, for Hashem. (35:5)

What is the meaning of Kechu me'itchem, "Take from yourselves?" From whom else should they take, if not from themselves? The sefer, Torei Zahav, offers an insightful interpretation of this phrase. One who is about to offer a terumah, portion, to Hashem; i.e., one who wants to determine the best medium, the strongest motivation, for serving Hashem, should take from himself. He should study his own life experiences and ask himself, "I receive so much from Hashem. I owe Him everything. I should serve Him in a manner that shows that I know, I care, I am thankful." The author cites the Chovos HaLevavos who offers the following thought. "Reuven" offers his home to "Shimon." He feeds him; he sustains him in a manner such that Shimon has no real needs. Everything has been addressed by Reuven. Is it too much for Reuven to expect that Shimon will not do him any harm? This is how we must act toward Hashem, Who gives us everything. He supplies everything that we need – perhaps not necessarily everything that we want, but our needs are all addressed. Kechu me'itchem, take from yourselves; we should seriously take note of all that we have and then our portion, our service to Hashem, will have greater meaning.

How often does the general community have a fundraising event for a worthy organization, a new building, a new institution, an innovative endeavor, and our response is: "It is not about me; I am past that stage; I support one yeshivah/school already, I do not carry in the eruv anyway, I am beyond mikvah, etc." We forget that terumah l'Hashem has nothing to do with this specific endeavor. While it may be true that we will not enjoy the fruits of a specific endeavor, Hashem certainly will, as it enhances kavod Shomayim, the glory of Heaven. We do not seem to refuse His munificence when we are on the receiving end. Kechu me'itchem; "Take for yourselves."

The Ben Ish Chai (Ben Ish Chayil) relates (an analogy) how a rebbe took a group of yeshivah students for a tiyul, trip. During the journey they came across a group of stevedores quietly carrying heavy crates on their shoulders. Their muscles seemed to be bulging from the heavy labor. Yet, they did not speak; they just carried. The rebbe said to his students, "See how they carry the load. A while ago, when they became stevedores, this was a most difficult and demeaning job. But, work is work, and some people work because they need to earn a living. Over time their muscles became stronger, to the point that carrying such heavy weights just does not bother them. On the contrary, they are stronger because of their daily work-out.

"Take a lesson from your daily learning. You never work up a sweat as these stevedores do. Why do they work so hard? Because they need the few dollars that they earn. If they are willing to work so tirelessly for a few dollars, how much more so should you toil in Torah for its incredible benefits, which strengthen you spiritually."

When one has positive spiritual goals and objectives, when ruchniyus, spirituality, plays a critical role in one's life, he looks for every way, every opportunity, to enhance himself – regardless of the toil, the expense, the many demands placed upon him. It is a terumah l'Hashem. On the other hand, when one lives purely for himself, he always finds an excuse to rationalize his indifference, his lack of participation in a given cause. One must realize that his kechu me'itchem defines his terumah l'Hashem.