

This week's *Parashah* opens with the *Mitzvah* to collect donations to build the *Mishkan* / Tabernacle. Many commentaries note that the Torah says, "Take a donation for Me," where we might have expected, "Give a donation for Me." R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762–1839; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Pressburg, Hungary; known as "*Chatam Sofer*") explains:

Megillat Esther relates that Haman offered to pay Achashveirosh 10,000 loaves of silver for the right to exterminate the Jewish People. *Midrash Rabbah* comments that *Hashem* said, "You wicked person! You are trying to buy what is mine with what is also mine, as it is written (*Chagga'i* 2:8), 'Silver is Mine!' and (*Vayikra* 25:55), 'For *Bnei Yisrael* are servants to Me!'" This, writes the *Chatam Sofer* may be understood along the same lines as the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 35a), which teaches that all food belongs to *Hashem* until we recite *Berachot* over it; then it belongs to us. Likewise, nothing belongs to man until he uses it to serve *Hashem*. Until then, it all belongs to *Hashem*. Haman's money was not his because he was not using it to serve *Hashem*; to the contrary, he used it to oppose *Hashem's* will.

In this light, continues the *Chatam Sofer*, we can understand why our vers says, "Take a donation for Me." When one uses his money for a *Mitzvah* purpose--for example, to build a *Mishkan*--it becomes his; he is taking it.

In reality, concludes the *Chatam Sofer*, it emerges that one who gives charity is always using *Hashem's* money. All that we contribute is the desire to do good. (*Torat Moshe*)

Bitachon

This year--a *Shemittah* year--we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing the related subject of *Bitachon* / placing one's trust in *Hashem*.

"*Chovot Ha'levavot*" (available in English as: "*Duties of the Heart*") by *Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l* (*Saragossa, Spain; early 11th century*) is one of the earliest--and still one of the most widely studied--systematic presentations of Judaism's ethical teachings and fundamental beliefs. The fourth "Gate" (section) of that work is "*Sha'ar Ha'Bitachon*."

R' Bachya begins: In the preceding section [of *Chovot Ha'levavot*], we discussed the obligation to accept upon oneself to serve *Elokim*. Now, we will write about the one thing that a person needs most in order to serve *Elokim*--namely, *Bitachon* in Him regarding all matters.

He continues: *Bitachon* has many benefits, whether in connection with one's spiritual life or one's material life. [The commentator R' Raphael ben Zechariah Mendel z"l (1725-1795; Yampola, Poland) explains: *Bitachon* can assist a person in attaining all of his goals, whether they are spiritual goals or material goals. (*Marpeh La'Nefesh*)]

[R' Bachya identifies ten benefits that one receives from having *Bitachon*. The first is:] *Bitachon* in *Hashem* places a person's mind at ease. Everyone has *Bitachon* in someone or something--if not in *Hashem*, then in oneself, a friend, one's wisdom, one's wealth, etc. This is a two-fold insult: first, not trusting in *Hashem* and, second, trusting in something else, as we read (*Yirmiyah* 2:13), "For My people has perpetrated two evils: [1] they have forsaken Me, the Source of living waters, [2] to dig for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." If a person chooses to place his trust in someone or something other than *Hashem*, *Hashem* will seem to abandon that person, leaving him in the power of the person or thing in which he trusts.

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Hamaayan / The Torah Spring

10815 Meadowhill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 / 301-593-2272

Send e-mail to: TheTorahSpring@gmail.com

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“Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and let them take a donation for Me, from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My donation.” (25:2)

Why does the verse switch from “a donation for Me” to “My donation”? R’ Gavriel Wolf Margolis z”l (1847-1935, rabbi of Grodna, Belarus, and later Boston, Massachusetts; son-in-law of the legendary *Tzaddik* “Reb Nachumke”) explains: The *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* states that a blessing rested on the donations for the *Mishkan* so that a small amount went very far. Indeed, this must be so, for how else could the fund-raising be completed in only two days?! As a result, even those who otherwise could not afford to make meaningful contributions were able to make significant donations. “From every man whose heart motivates him”--whether he can afford a large donation or not--“you shall take My donation”--I, *Hashem*, will turn it into something meaningful. (*Torat Gavriel*)

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R’ Bachya continues: Moreover, one who relies on his own wisdom and efforts will inevitably realize that he cannot accomplish his goals on his own, as we read (*Kohelet* 9:11), “The race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, nor does bread come to the wise, riches to the intelligent . . .” Even if one amasses wealth, he will realize eventually that it cannot bring him the happiness he would have attained through *Bitachon*. [Thus, summarizes the commentary *B’yosher Levav, Bitachon* is the only way to be free of worries.] (*Sha’ar Ha’Bitachon*: Preface)

R’ Yitzchak Ze’ev Soloveitchik z”l (1886-1959; rabbi of Brisk, Poland; later in Yerushalayim; known as the “*Brisker Rav*”) told his student R’ Eliezer Palchinsky z”l (1912-2007; *Rosh Yeshiva* in Israel) that he received a large dowry, and he decided to invest it in real estate, thinking he could live off of the profits and learn Torah undisturbed.

Soon after, World War I erupted, and all of his properties were destroyed. The *Brisker Rav* related that, feeling like the earth had opened up and swallowed him alive, he sought strength in the pages of *Sha’ar Ha’Bitachon* of *Chovot Ha’levavot*. Upon completing that study, he concluded that the greatest asset a person can have in life is *Bitachon*. He said: Our Sages teach (*Avot* ch.4), “Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot.” This does not mean, as some think, that accepting one’s lot is the next best thing to wealth. After all, *Bitachon* does not fill a person’s empty bank account. Rather, our Sages are teaching that the happiness with one’s lot, the peace of mind, that comes from trusting in *Hashem* is itself the greatest wealth a person can have. (*Matnat Chelko* p.3)

“Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and let them take a donation for Me . . .” (25:2)

Rashi comments: “For Me” means “*Li’Shmi*” / “for the glory of My Name.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Yosef Karo z”l (1488-1575; Greece and *Eretz Yisrael*; author of the *Shulchan Aruch* and other works) writes: It says in our *Parashah*, “Take a donation for Me,” and (verse 8), “Make a Sanctuary for Me.” These verses hint that every act done for a holy purpose should include a declaration, “I am doing this for a holy purpose.” This is similar to the custom that, when preparing a chair for Eliyahu *Ha’navi* at a *Brit Milah*, we speak the words, “This is the chair of Eliyahu *Ha’navi*.” (*Maggid Meisharim*)

Similarly, R’ Avraham Abele Gombiner z”l (influential *Halachic* authority; Poland; died 1682) writes: One should say about each item one buys for *Shabbat*, “This is in honor of *Shabbat*.”

(*Magen Avraham* 250:1)

R’ Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z”l *Hy”d* (1885-1945; rabbi of, and *Rosh Yeshiva* in, Pieštany, Czechoslovakia) writes: When one states expressly that the purpose of his actions is to perform a *Mitzvah* or a good deed, he receives a form of Divine protection that weakens the *Yetzer Ha’ra*’s ability to interfere with his plans. In light of this, we can have a new understanding of the verse (*Tehilim* 122:1), “I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of *Hashem*’.” Because they said, “to Me”--that they were doing this for *Hashem*’s honor--there was greater assurance that they would succeed in reaching their goal--the house of *Hashem*. Therefore, I rejoiced. (*Mishneh Sachir Al Ha’Torah* p.678)

Our Sages say, “Engage in Torah study and *Mitzvot* even if it is not *Li’shmah* / with the proper intention, for by acting not *Li’shmah*, one will eventually act *Li’shmah*.”

R’ Yaakov Niman z”l (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Ohr Yisrael in Lida, Poland and Petach Tikvah, Israel; died 1983) asks: Why, then, does *Rashi* emphasize here that donations toward building the *Mishkan* / Tabernacle should be given *Li’shmah*?

He answers: Our Sages teach that *Hashem* does not deny any person reward for his good deeds. Even a *Mitzvah* performed not *Li’shmah* is deserving of some reward, and that reward will be paid.

Nevertheless, writes R’ Niman, creating a place for the *Shechinah* / G-d’s Revelation to reside requires *Li’shmah*, as we read (25:8), “Make a Sanctuary for Me”--for My sake alone. (*Darchei Mussar*)