

Terumoh – The Kindness In Giving Tzedokoh – Meir Cooper (reprinted)

ו' אדר תשע"ז – 4th March 2017 – שבת פ' תרומה

Our Parsha commences with Hashem's command to Moshe Rabbeinu "Speak to the Children of Israel to make donations....". The giving of charity is painful for it incurs financial sacrifice. Therefore the Baal HaTurim compares the word "Daber" in the passuk quoted to the word "Daber" in Yeshaya Ch. 40 where the Prophet is to "speak" words of comfort to Am Yisrael over the destruction of the Temple.

The Gemara in Ketuvot [Daf 67b] relates that Mar Ukva - when leaving the Beit Hamedrash - would deposit 4 zuz each day anonymously in the letterbox of a poor person in his area. It happened on one occasion that he was late in leaving the Beit Hamedrash and his wife who would meet him half way home, had this time reached the Beit Hamedrash as he was leaving. On this same day the poor person who received 4 zuz from Mar Ukva each day was curious to know the identity of the anonymous donor. Accordingly he waited next to the door of his house till the money was placed in the letterbox. When Mar Ukva and his wife perceived the presence of the poor man they fled the scene so as not to put him to shame, and, in order to hide from the poor man, they entered an oven where the embers were still smouldering.

The Gemara recounts that Mar Ukva's feet started burning from the intense heat – his wife immediately placed her feet on the burning embers and told him that her feet would not burn because her merit in giving tzedaka was greater than his. She was always at home when the poor people knocked, and she would give them ready prepared food – thus their enjoyment of her charity was instant whereas the money provided by Mar Ukva still needed to be converted into the poor man's actual requirements. Accordingly, the poor man's enjoyment was not instant.

One may ask – surely the merit of Mar Ukva was greater than that of his wife because he gave to the poor man on a daily basis and in a clandestine manner whereas his wife gave to the poor quite overtly – furthermore there is no evidence that she supplied poor people on a daily basis!

The Gemara continues that in entering the oven they performed the adjunct of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai when, in addressing the attitude of Tamar towards Yehuda stated that "it is more comfortable for a person to throw himself into a burning furnace and not to publicly shame his fellow man in public" (Sotah 10b). We may well ask that the phraseology "it is more comfortable" hardly describes the experience of a person in a burning furnace – why did Rabbi Shimon not say "it is better" or "it is mandatory".

In order to get a better appreciation of the words of Rabbi Shimon let us imagine a mother carrying her small child out in the open on a particularly cold day. She will instinctively wrap her shawl around the child to ensure that he is truly protected from the elements – does the mother feel the cold? Probably not – she is so engrossed in her child's welfare that she is neither aware nor feels the cold conditions prevailing.

So it was with Mar Ukva's wife. Her contact with the needy knocking at her door begging for a bite was much more personal. Firstly she could assess the exact requirements of the poor person – maybe he also needs some clothing or some medicine and who knows how many words of encouragement she gave him thus raising the spirits of her visitor and giving him new hope for the future. When she saw the poor man running after Mar Ukva and herself, all her senses became focused on the wellbeing of this person and that he should feel no shame. Her all consuming passion of the moment derived from the numerous occasions she had tended poor people in the present and the past, and made her oblivious to the smouldering oven. She felt no discomfort because she was so deeply immersed in her sole objective not to cause shame to this poor man.

Giving charity can either be an almost mechanical motion - the performance of the Mitzva or it can be an occasion to become personally involved in the plight of the recipient and to make a conscious effort to release some of the misery felt by the person who is dependent upon the mercies of others.

The word "Terumoh" derives from the root "rom" – elevation, he who gives tzedaka in all its glory becomes truly elevated!