A-20

NORMAN LAMM Minchah Sermon Terumah ~~Feb.~~ March 1, 1952

A-20

It is perhaps symptomatic of our age, that the mere mention of the word "charity" by a Rabbi is enough to evoke, in his listeners, a feeling of uneasiness which is usually expressed in the annoying thought, "well, here comes an appeal again". Charity has been snatched off its lofty pedestal of G-dly ethics and squeezed through the narrow channels of commercialism. It has been transformed from a moral necessity into a social advantage. Or, to be fair, we would say that where charity was once regarded as afunction to be executed as a personal privelege, it is nowadays considered only as a pressing communal urgency. The personal element is all but gone. The sense of Mitzvah has been pushed into the background. It is fitting, therefore, to return to the original meaning of charity - as "tzdakah", which means "righteousness", or "terumah" which means "uplifting" or "dedication to G-d". The portion of this week concerns itself with "terumah", the giving of the tithes; and the laws concerning ~~Terumah~~ terumah might perhaps shed some light on modern and also universal problems in the giving of ~~Ter, or charity.~~ terumah or charity.

Just as the Torah dedicated an entire Sidra or portion to ~~Ter.~~ terumah, so did the Mishnah devote an entire tractate to this matter, and the tractate is indeed known as "Massechet Terumah". And the very first Mishnah in that tractate begins, not with an outline of the proper way of offering ~~terumah~~, but, in a uniquely Jewish way, with all the wrong ways of giving charity. ~~or Ter.~~ Our Mishnah reads: חמשה פרקנין אין תרומתן תרומה There are five people who give ~~Ter.~~ terumah, or five methods whereby a person can offer it, which are legally invalid; the offering is not at all regarded as real ~~genuine~~ terumah. These five have, in the method of their donating, indicated a serious imperfection which makes their entire effort null and void. And, therefore, he who would give meaningfully and properly must first learn to avoid these five pitfalls.

1. חרש . The ~~Ter~~ terumah of a "cheresh" is of no significance. What is a "cheresh"? The Mishna itself explains: חרש לקטנו זו תמהים בין מקום שאינן שומע ואינן מדבר. Whenever the Rabbis mention this term they refer to one who is deaf and dumb, one who can neither hear nor speak. And how true! I feel sure that many of us have met up with such people, people who give charity, but who are DEAF. They are people whose budgets are their masters. They know that a certain amount of one's income should be given to others. They feel that a certain part of their earnings should be devoted to charitable undertakings. And so they give, 5% or 10% or 20%. That is all good and well. But ~~if~~ what if an emergency should occur? What if that pre-ordained amount has already been given, and a matter of dire and pressing need is presented to them? There is no answer, they are deaf to your pleas. With them charity is a matter of percentage not principle; of accounting to the government, not accounting to G-d; of cold reckoning, not warm sympathy; of writing figures, not hearing the hoarse cry in the hour of need. Such charity is unworthy of a Jew. It is not Ter., uplifting. No matter howwell one has provided for philanthropic purposes, he must never be deaf, he must always be ready to respond.

But there is also the "cheresh" who speaks not. His dumbness is legendary. He will give how much ever is required or requested of him. He is an easy going person who understandsthe needs of others, and is willing to help. But ask him to himself aid in the organization of charity, and the answer is a categorical "No". He is busy, he is lazy, he is shy, he is uninterested, he has other philanthropic affairs. He is, in short, afflicted with extreme passivity. He refuses to raise his voice for others. He refuses to make himself heard to others whom he might urge to give. He will give Ter to others, but he will not collect it for others. It is a spiritual dumbness, a silencing of the soul. Jewish tradition has always insisted on the elevated position of the "gabbai tsedakah". Only thus can one be sure that he has completely and perfectly observed the mitzvah of Terumah.

2. שוטה . The charity of a "shoteh", a fool, does not partake of the sanctity of Ter. The madman or fool is a man who is a miser without "sechel" or reason, and when he gives, he gives without "sechel", without reason. With him charity is not a matter of giving, it is, no matter how small the effort, squandering. His philanthropy is indiscriminate. He knows not whereof he gives nor to whom he donates. He does not care whether or not the recipient

is worthy of his offering. It matters little to him whether the charity to which he donates is an organization of theives or of pious and deserving people. The "shoteh she'taram" is the Jew who will give heavily to a "Jewish" hospital albeit that it refuses to institute a kosher kitchen. He is satisfied to give his all to a "Jewish" university which schedules football games on Shabbos, while a Yeshiva University is neglected by him. All are the true qualities of the Shoteh. The Talmud discusses the charactersistics of the Shoteh, and decides that one of the main attributes of the legally insane is unsocial eccentric behavior. The Talmud describes this eccentricity very beautifully: אין דרכיו הקבורה One who does not sleep in bed, as others do, but he sleeps in a cemetery. He is, in colloquial language, a "queer" of the severest kind. But not only in the matter of his personal tastes for over-night lodging is the Shateh a אין דרכיו הקבורה. His charity or Ter is invalid for the same reason. He will give unquestioningly to any fund, though its purpose be lifeless and its accomplishments dead. He will identify himself with so-called "philanthropies" though their drain innocent funds as the graveyard yawns for bodies. The funds colleceted are never used to give new life, they are dead funds, and the organizations of this sort are, because of their fraudulence, the graveyard of the philanthropic instincts of mankind. The fool who supports such undertakings is one who sleeps in a graveyard. In other ways, too, is the אין דרכיו הקבורה symptomatic of a Shoteh. It all too often happens that a Jew will identify himself with a charitable project for one reason and one reason only - it gives him cemetery benefits. A man who gives only so that he may be laid to eternal rest in a graveyard is a madman and afool, and his charity is meaningless, - and foolish.

3. קטן. A "katan" is a youngster, or, in legal language, a minor. And a minor who dispenses charity is not credited with having given Ter. You see, the point here is more than legalistic. It is moral too. For a Katan, the Talmud tells us frequently, is עושה על מנת לקבל פרס, he does things not for their own sake, but only so that he can come home and talk about his great exploits. He aims not at the felicity of others, but at the publicity of himself. Open the Yiddish papers any day of the week and you will find, staring blandly at you, the "k'tanim" of our contemporary public life. The nauseating regularity with which their potraits disfigure our press only serves to accentuate their smallness, their pettiness, their "katnuss". This sort of money given is not recorded by G-d in the ledger of charity or Ter. It is recorded in the Personal Expense Section of the Book of General Accounts under the heading of Publicity and Public Relations Expenses. Certainly this is not Terumah, uplifting; if anything, it is degrading, it drags down.

4. התורם שאינו שלו. The fourth category is - he who gives, but not from his own pockets. The fat, juicy check he writes was not earned with his sweat and blood. It is was earned by the sweat and blood of others and appropiated by his guile and deceit and cunning. This is not Ter. - it is hypocricy. Like the Robber Barons of American History, he exercises his knavery and treachery by embezzling the meagre belongings of the poor and the unfortunate; he is the one who causes them to be thrown to charity, he presses them onto the relief rolls, and then he shows his big-heartedness and magnanimity by offering them his benevolent aid. His Ter is "aino shelo", he is merely returning what never belonged to him. You see, Judaism demands that charity be "clean" money, for money can often be "stained". In the "Rosh Chodesh Benchen" we, according to our "nusach ha'tefilla" pray for a month of "parnassah", sustenance. But there are certain Sephardic versions which mention "parnassah tovah" - good sustenance, a clean and honest "parnassah". If it is unclean and dishonestly attained, then even if it used for charitable purposes "aino terumah", it is invalidated as Ter.

5. עכו"ם שעשה שליחות לישראל. The last case is he whose money goes towards charitable goals, but he is not the one to donate it. It is the "akum", the gentile who does the giving for him. If the gentile would let him be, he would shut his ears to the call of humanitarian organizations. Education, Israel, Maos Chittim, nothing would bother him. But when The Akum, in the form of Uncle Sam, demands an income tax, but allows deductions for charities, then the giving of Ter suddenly becomes very cheap and easy. True, the funds thus made availableare needed, and such people should not be discouraged, but nevertheless, this is not the Jewish awy of paying the tithes. It is Ter at the point of an income tax return. The giving of Ter. involve more than the making available of food or funds for the Kohen and Levi.

It includes as well the uplifting of the soul of the donor. And if the donor is to be uplifted, it is he who must give, not the Akum who gives for him. Today's Sidra begins not with ויקחו לי תרומה, "And they shall give to me Ter", which would indicate a mere mechanical act of giving, merely satisfying the kohanim who recieve, but ויקחו לי תרומה "and they shall take unto Me Ter", it involves the taking a part of yourself and sanctifying it. It means not giving what you have, but giving what you are. Charity which doesn't hurt is not Ter. Real, sincere, genuine Ter must come from yourself, not the akum, it must pinch your pocket, not that of the government. Ter must not be allowed to degenerate to a perfunctory form of social behavior and tax circumvention. It must forever remain an experience of self-dedication and sacrifice.

These five, then, are not Jewish types. Their Ter is invalid.:

The Cheresh who will hear no plea of urgency, and will not have his say in running charity affairs;

The Shotah who does not discriminate between the genuine and the fraudulent;

The Katan who gives only to see his name in print, to publicize himself;

The Torem She'eno Shelo who gives what never belonged to him legitimately;

and The Akum Shetarem Shel Yisroel, the Jew who gives only because he would have to give it to the government anyway.

It is an ancient Jewish assertion that מתוך לשאר אותה שואין הן from the negative one can deduce the positive, from the study of what is wrong one can understand what is right. We have this afternoon discussed the Mishna which describes the WRONG ways of Ter and Charity; let us take them t o heart, and learn the RIGHT RIGHT ways of charity, so that our philanthropy may result in a reciprocal TERUMAH, in an uplifting of our spirits to new and sublime heights.