

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion: *Tetzaveh*

KINDS OF SERVICE

מֶלֶךְ בְּמִשְׁפָּט יַעֲמִיד אֶרֶץ וְאִישׁ תְּרוּמוֹת יִהְרֹסֶנָּה:

With justice a King establishes the land; a fraudulent person tears it down. (Proverbs 29:7)
Melekh b'mishpat ya'amid aretz, v'ish t'rumat yeharsenah

ואלה המשפטים, זש"ה מלך במשפט יעמיד ארץ ואיש תרומות יהרסנה (משלי כט)
מלכה של תורה במשפט שהוא עושה מעמיד את הארץ, ואיש תרומות יהרסנה אם משים
אדם עצמו כתרומה הזו שמושלכת בזויות הבית ואומר מה לי בטורח הצבור מה לי
בדיניהם מה לי לשמוע קולם שלום עליך נפשי הרי זה מחרים את העולם הרי ואיש
תרומות יהרסנה, מעשה ברבי אסי כשהיה מסתלק מן העולם נכנס בן אחותו אצלו מצאו
בוכה, א"ל רבי מפני מה אתה בוכה יש תורה שלא למדת ולימדת הרי תלמידך יושבים
לפניך יש גמילות חסדים שלא עשית ועל כל מדות שהיו בך היית מתרחק מן הדין ולא
נתת רשות על עצמך להתמנות על צרכי צבור, א"ל בני עליה אני בוכה שמא אתן דין
וחשבון על שהייתי יכול לעשות דיניהם של ישראל הרי ואיש תרומות יהרסנה.

“A fraudulent person (*ish t'rumat*) tears it down.” If a person makes himself like *t'rumah* and sets himself apart in the corner of his house and says, “What do I care about the burdens of the community? What stake do I have in their disputes? Why should I listen to their voices? My soul is at peace.” -- that person destroys the world.

[AVODAH commentary: *Terumah* is the part of the harvest that is set apart for donations to support the priests. This midrash explains *ish t'rumat*, a fraudulent person, as “someone who always sets himself apart.”]

A story about Rabbi Assi: When he was about to die, his nephew came to visit and found him crying. “Why are you crying?” he asked Rabbi Assi. “Is it because you feel you have fallen short in Torah? But is there any Torah that you have not studied yourself and taught to others?! Behold, all of your students are right here before you.

“Is it because you feel you are lacking in acts of kindness? But is there any act of kindness that you failed to perform?! And [you were humble as well]. Despite your great stature, you did not involve yourself in disputes, and you never allowed yourself to be appointed [to a position of influence] over communal affairs.”

Rabbi Assi responded, “It is exactly on account of that [last point] that I am crying. I am afraid that I may be asked to account for the fact that I was capable of arbitrating disputes among the Jewish people, [yet I did not].” [Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim #2]

QUESTION: The word “volunteer” derives from the Latin root for “will.”

Volunteering is something we want to do, something we choose freely as a way to spend our time. According to this midrash, Rabbi Assi seems to be regretting a choice he made regarding about whether or not to involve himself in public service. In what ways is volunteering a choice we make, and in what ways is it something else?