Jewish Tribune – Pekudei

**The Starfish**

This week’s parsha concludes the parshiyos that deal with the Mishkan. My wife shared a wonderful idea with me that she heard in the name of Rabbi Abraham Twerski ztl.

Klal Yisroel are asked to donate to create a Mishkan – a “home” for Hashem’s Shechina to reside. Essentially, Klal Yisroel are giving and HKBH is receiving. Of course, HKBH doesn’t need our gifts and donations. Rather, He is modelling a trait that we need to emulate – namely, that sometimes in life we need to be receivers.

It is often easier and more desirable to be on the giving end and not the receiving end. But sometimes that is what we need to do.

Let me explain this further by way of a well-known story.

An old man was walking walked down the beach at dawn and noticed a young boy picking up a starfish and putting them into the sea. He asked the boy why he was doing this. The boy answered that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and there are thousands of starfish,” countered the old man. “How can your efforts make any difference?”

The young boy looked at the starfish in his hand and placed it safely into the waves. “It makes a difference to this one,” he said.

Most of us hear the story and focus on the benevolence of the young boy and indeed live our lives according to this principle of making a difference to one starfish at a time.

I recently came across a wonderful article by Rebbetzen Maria Beider who once heard a different take to this story, which turned it upside down. She was asked: “Who was your starfish thrower? Who threw you back into the sea?”

At various times in our lives, we have been vulnerable starfish and there were people who threw us back into the waves. Who were our starfish throwers? And did we ever thank them?

Was it a primary school teacher who noticed and encouraged us? A high school Rebbi who gave us chizuk or guided us when we needed it most? A family friend, or someone in shul who said the right thing or gave us time or help?

To quote Rebbetzen Beider: “We all have times when we need to be carried on another’s wings or given a helping hand. Sometimes it is hard for us to see we are the stranded ones and drying up on the beach. Sometimes it is difficult to ask for the help to get back to where we need to be. But we must remember that we are not divided into helpful starfish throwers and helpless starfish. We take turns in life. There is a time to help and a time to be helped.”

Perhaps this is what Rabbi Twerski means. HKBH is modelling this with the Mishkan. HKBH is the “Kol Yochol” and does not need our donations to create a Mishkan. He can make it appear in a flash with all its beauty and splendour. But perhaps He is teaching us an important lesson and showing us that sometimes in life if you are feeling stuck, you must reach out and accept the help from others.

Being aware that we take turns in life and there is a time to help and a time to be helped, makes receiving easier.

And perhaps that is a message that HKBH is demonstrating to us with the building of the Mishkan.

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