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ON REEH - 5767

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From: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Sent: Thursday, August 31, 2006 10:56
Subject: The Great Protection of Charity by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

The Great Protection of Charity
By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

As the Day of Judgment rapidly approaches, thoughtful Jews the world over are looking for ways to better their chances for a healthy and sweet New Year. In our High Holiday liturgy we say with great emotion that there are three special ingredients in the recipe to repeal a possible evil decree. They are Tshuvah, Tefilah and Tzedakah – Repentance, Prayer and Charity. Today, I'd like to zoom-in on the powerful defense of tzedakah.

It is interesting to note that when it comes to charity, the Torah departs from its customary way. On the whole, the Torah does not offer rewards for mitzvahs. This is because, "Schar mitzvah behai alma leka," the reward for mitzvahs is not in this world but in the World-to-Come. Furthermore, in the best-case scenario, we are supposed to do the mitzvahs "Shelo al menas lekabel pras," without thoughts of recompense, for considering all that Hashem does for us, is it appropriate to ask for a tip as well? However, when it comes to the mitzvah of tzedakah, the Torah and Chazal wax eloquently about the material rewards due to the charitable person. The Torah tells us, "Aser t'aser – You shall surely tithe," which the Gemora expounds upon to mean, "Aser beshvil sh'tisasher – Take tithes in order to become rich." The Novi also tells us, "Uvachonuni na b'zos – You may test Me in this area (in charity)... Im lo harikosi lachem bracha ad bli dai – And you will see that I will shower you with blessing until you declare, 'I have enough.'" In Pirkei Avos we are taught, "Marbe tzedakah, marbe shalom – One who increases his charitable output will increase harmony and tranquility in his or her own life." And, we all know the vital Talmudic adage, "Tzedakah tatzil mimaves – Charity saves from death." I believe that one of the reasons why the Torah offers so many wonderful 'lollipops' for the philanthropic person is because there is a stern Torah directive on how to give charity. The Torah demands from us, "Al yeirah levovecha b'sitcha lo – Let not your heart be pained when you give of your money to the poor." Now, this is understandably a very tough commandment to uphold – especially if one lives on a tight budget. It is not easy to part with your hard-earned money without feeling a natural pang of dismay – or worse. It therefore follows logically why Hashem offers all of these luscious rewards to assure us that, as we take money out of the wallet to give it to the poor, we are not losing anything even in this world. Rather, we are making one of the most prudent investments available to mankind.

Of course, when it comes to our Rosh Hashanah preparations, we are

especially interested in the assurance that 'Tzedakah tatzil mimaves,' that charity saves from death for, as we know, on Yom Kippur, the Book of Life and the Book of Death are open before Hashem and He renders the final seal of our fates for each and every one on this awesome day. Why is it that charity is unique in its ability to save our lives? Why don't we say "Shabbos tatzil mimaves," or "Kashrus tatzil mimaves," or perhaps "Taharas mishpocha-family purity tatzil mimaves?" What is so special about charity that it is vested with such awesome power? I believe the reason is as follows. Let's say you make twenty-five dollars an hour. You then go to shul on Shabbos and they have an appeal for Hatzoloh, the local Bikur Cholim, or your community yeshiva or day school. You benevolently respond by giving one hundred dollars. In essence, what are you really giving to charity? Let's examine this carefully. It took you four hours to earn that money, so what you are really giving to charity is four hours of your life. We know that Hashem rewards in a very liberal way measure-for-measure the mitzvahs that we do. Therefore, since we are giving to charity some portion of our life, Hashem will reward us back with extra life, thus beautifully explaining why charity saves us from death. So, let's look for opportunities at this time of the year to give extra tzedakah. There are plenty of interesting possibilities. The enemy's rockets have displaced many of our brethren in Eretz Yisroel and they urgently need our assistance. With rapidly escalating prices for so many goods and services due exorbitantly skyrocketing fuel costs, the poor have greater needs than ever in managing the basic needs of everyday life. But remember, giving charity is not only restricted to giving cash. Lending a friendly ear to a troubled person, spending a Sunday with a lonely soul, extending a helping hand to one who is desperately looking for a shidduch, or helping to negotiate a tuition contract for a family that is already floundering in credit card debt are all ways that one can invest in the great defense offered by tzedakah – even if the giver is not among the very wealthy. May it be the will of Hashem that we always remain able to give and never need to take, and in the merit of our increased tzedakah, may Hashem bless us with a healthy, happy, and sweet New Year. To receive a weekly cassette tape or CD directly from Rabbi Weiss, please write to Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss, P.O. Box 140726, Staten Island, NY 10314 or contact him at RMMWSI@aol.com. Attend Rabbi Weiss's weekly shiur at the Landau Shul, Avenue L and East 9th in Flatbush, Tuesday nights at 9:30 p.m. Rabbi Weiss's Daf Yomi shiurim can be heard LIVE on Kol Haloshon at (718) 906-6400. Write to KolHaloshon@gmail.com for details. (Sheldon Zeitlin transcribes Rabbi Weiss' articles. If you wish to receive Rabbi Weiss' articles by email, please send a note to ZeitlinShelley@aol.com.)

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig
Choices: Inter-marriage and Internet

I

"Re'eh anochi nosein lifneichem hayom - see, I place before you today" (Devarim 11:26). The Vilna Gaon (in Kol Eliyahu) comments on each of the five words of the parsha's opening phrase:

"Re'eh - see" in singular, to teach - see what is before you, and do not follow the negative behavior of the world around you.

"Anochi - I" How can one overcome the Yetzer Hara that impels him to sin? The answer - I [Hashem] will be with you [Anochi Eyeh Imach] and will help you against the ever present evil inclination. Only with Anochi, Hashem's help, can one prevail (Kiddushin 30b).

"Nosein - place", is in the present tense. Even if one has made bad choices in the past, it is always possible to choose properly for the future.

"Lifneichem - before you". One may say, how do I know which choice is correct? "Before you" indicates that if you look with a discerning eye at the unfolding story of Am Yisroel, all will be clear to you (see Iturei Torah).

"Hayom - today". One may ask, even if I repent, how can I undo the sins of the past? "Today" teaches that a ba'al teshuva is like a child who is born today, and all of his sins are erased.

II

The last two words of the passuk are "beracha u'klala - blessing and curse". Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch relates "beracha" to breicha, a water supply, and klala to kal, light, shallow, worthless, completely without weight.

Choices which seem inconsequential are often extremely significant. A positive decision, such as a proper Torah education, or a proper parental model, affect generations "downstream". The word beracha contains three letters whose arithmetic value begins with two, signifying how blessings can multiply. Indeed, the ramifications of a blessed decision can be, like a spring (breicha), eternal.

Poor choices about seemingly insignificant matters can yield devastating results. Many such decisions are reached when one does not realize their gravity and implications. Hence curse results from a failure to make a weighty decision. The matter seems trivial, expediency governs, and only in hindsight can a major negative consequence be traced to a choice which, when made, seemed harmless.

III

Every person has a nekudas bechira - point of choice (Michtav Me'Eliyahu I p.112 - 117). Some choices are beneath that point. A Torah Jew need not choose to avoid non-kosher food or work on Shabbos. It is taken for granted. Some choices are above that point. Many Torah Jews are guilty of lashon hara or bitul Torah without choosing to do so. It does not occur to them that their behavior is problematic.

Our goal in life is to raise our nekudas bechira. For example, one whose vocabulary includes profanities is constantly choosing whether to utter them. A Torah Jew should resolve to never use such words. His subsequent behavior is "forced" by his previous decision. He need not choose whether or not to use foul language. The offensive terms are simply not in his vocabulary.

Our point of choice (nekudas bechira) rises and falls in accordance with the choices that we make daily. Over time these points form a line which goes up and down depending on the status of the person (Michtav Me'Eliyahu V p. 18). One is punished for lowering the point of choice, and any misdeed about which one rationalizes or seeks excuses is within the range of the nekudas bechira (p. 500).

The greater a person is, the greater is his yetzer hara (Sukka 52a). In order to maintain even choices, for one who has a strong parental or educational background, or who has reached a high spiritual level, a more powerful evil inclination is created (p. 355).

IV

Each generation and community faces unique challenges. As mentioned, the parsha begins "Re'eh", see, in singular, lifneichem, before you, in plural. We are warned not to follow the sinful behavior of our time and place. Sometimes a careful analysis of current practice and trends is essential for a proper choice.

For two centuries, since the Emancipation of European Jews undermined insular Orthodox communities, the challenge of dealing with the seductions of the non-Jewish world has increased exponentially. The greatest threat to our very existence is intermarriage, which includes marriage to non-Jews who have undergone non-halachic conversions.

Many may rightfully insist that this sin is beneath their nekudas bechira and need not be addressed in the Torah community. However, as we have been recently reminded, an observant upbringing and Orthodox education is no guarantee.

Moreover, the nekudas bechira moves insidiously. Seemingly small changes in attitude and beliefs, followed by gradual, nearly imperceptible,

waning in Torah observance, can, incrementally, lead to the worst sins. Only in hindsight can the klala be attributed to decisions taken lightly (kal) long before.

Rav Soloveitchik zt"l was once approached by a distraught parent whose child was about to intermarry. The grieving father told the Rav that he had sent his daughter to a major Midwestern university campus. It was this seemingly innocuous choice, Rav Soloveitchik replied, that led to the unfortunate result (see Berachos 32a and "A Parent's Guide to Orthodox Assimilation on University Campuses")

V

Recently, the internet has dramatically changed many aspects of modern life. Like most facilitating phenomena, the internet has many very positive aspects. Yet we sometimes ignore its negative potential.

For example, pornography is a scourge which has plagued our society for a long time. However, as a recent seminar I noted, it used to be a "subculture", requiring acquisition of embarrassing, often illegal, material. Today, it has entered mainstream culture by its being accessible everywhere online. This development has moved the point of choice for Torah Jews as well. For many, acquiring pornographic material was, in the past, beneath their point of choice. However, the ease of a click of a button at home or work, or being lured by a pop-up on the screen, has made avoiding pornography a challenge and test.

Many rabbonim, including myself, have dealt with marriages threatened by a wife's discovering her husband's viewing of internet pornography. One who believes that otherwise scrupulously observant Jews, ordained Rabbis, or Torah educators do not make the wrong choice on this matter is simply mistaken.

Some rabbonim have, therefore, advocated a ban on the internet. Such a ban may be impractical or above our point of choice. Yet we dare not trivialize the significant danger the internet presents, or limit our acknowledgement of the danger to our children. The internet and the evil inclination form a potentially lethal combination for all.

The Vilan Gaon has taught us that, with Hashem's help, we can overcome the most ubiquitous yetzer hara. Bad choices of the past can be reversed, and sins erased. An eternally blessed future is within our reach. However, for this bracha to take effect, we must avoid klala, making poor choices on seemingly inconsequential matters without realizing the curse which may result. As we read parsha Re'eh, we must resolve to discern which choice is beracha, which is klala, and to choose beracha.

[1] "Treatment for Internet Porn: A Social Epidemic", Mary Jo Barret, Psychotherapy Networker, March 2007

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[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

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Re'eh 5767 - Tzedakah: the Untranslatable Virtue

TUCKED AWAY IN TODAY'S SEDRA, almost as an aside in the course of explaining the law of shemittah (the year of "release" in which debts were cancelled), is one of Judaism's most majestic institutions, the principle of tzedakah:

If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your G-d is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks. Tzedakah lies at the heart of Judaism's understanding of mitzvot, bein adam le-chavero, interpersonal duties. An idea going back four thousand years, it remains challenging today. To understand it, though, a brief historical note is necessary.

In a key passage in Bereishith – the only passage in which the Torah explains why G-d singled out Abraham to be the founder of a new faith – we read:

Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just [tzedakah u-mishpat], so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." The "way of the Lord" is defined here by two words, tzedakah and mishpat. They are both forms of justice, but are quite different in their logic. Mishpat means retributive justice. It refers to the rule of law, through which disputes are settled by right rather than might. Law distinguishes between innocent and guilty. It establishes a set of rules, binding on all, by means of which the members of a society act in such a way as to pursue their own interests without infringing on the rights and freedoms of others. Few if any civilizations have robbed law with greater dignity than Judaism. It is the most basic institution of a free society. It is no coincidence that in Judaism, G-d reveals himself primarily in the form of laws, for Judaism is concerned not just with salvation (the soul in its relationship with G-d) but also with redemption (society as a vehicle for the divine presence). A law-governed society is a place of mishpat.

But mishpat alone cannot create a good society. To it must be added tzedakah, distributive justice. One can imagine a society which fastidiously observes the rule of law, and yet contains so much inequality that wealth is concentrated into the hands of the few, and many are left without the most basic requirements of a dignified existence. There may be high unemployment and widespread poverty. Some may live in palaces while others go homeless. That is not the kind of order that the Torah contemplates. There must be justice not only in how the law is applied, but also in how the means of existence – wealth as G-d's blessing – are distributed. That is tzedakah. Why then is it set out so briefly in the Torah itself? The answer is that the Torah is a set of timeless ideals that are to be realised in the course of time; and not all times are the same. The immediate focus of the Torah from the exodus onwards is the creation of a society in the land of Israel – the society that actually emerged from the days of Joshua to the close of the biblical era. Its economy (as were all ancient economies) was primarily agricultural. Therefore, the Torah sets out its programme of tzedakah in great detail in terms of an agrarian order.

There was the seventh year, when debts were cancelled. In the seventh year of service, slaves went free. There was the Jubilee in which ancestral lands returned to their original owners. There were the "corner of the field", the "forgotten sheaf", the "gleanings" of grain and wine harvest, and the tithes in the third and sixth years that were given to the poor. In these ways and others the Torah established the first form of what in the twentieth century came to be known as a welfare state – with one significant difference. It did not depend on a state. It was part of society, implemented not by power but by moral responsibility and the network of obligations created by the covenant at Sinai. It was an exceptionally beautiful structure.

But the genius of the Torah is that it does not predicate its social vision on a single era or a particular economic order. Alongside the specifics is a broad statement of timeless ideal. That is the role of the verses quoted

above, which served as the basis for rabbinic legislation on tzedakah.

Tzedakah refers to more than gifts of produce; it includes gifts of money – the medium of exchange in all advanced societies whatever their economic base. Thus what in biblical times was a relatively minor provision became – when Israel was no longer a nation in its own land, and when most of its people no longer lived and worked on farms – the very lifeblood of its system of distributive justice.

Maimonides, in his halakhic code the Mishneh Torah, makes a fascinating observation: "We have never seen or heard of a Jewish community without a tzedakah fund [kupah shel tzedakah]." He adds:

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous, the seed of Abraham our father, as it is said, "For I know him that he will command his children to do tzedakah." The throne of Israel and the religion of truth is upheld only through tzedakah, as it is said, "In tzedakah shall you be established" (Isaiah 54: 14). Israel is redeemed only through tzedakah, as it is said, "Zion shall be redeemed with judgement and those that return by tzedakah" (Isaiah 1: 27) . . . All Jews and those attached to them are like brothers, as it is said, "You are sons of the Lord your G-d" (Deut. 14:1), and if a brother will not show mercy to his brother, who then will have mercy on him? Tzedakah was thus, both in ideal and reality, constitutive of Jewish community life, the moral bond between Jew and Jew (though it should be noted that Jewish law also obligates Jews to give tzedakah to non-Jews under the rubric of darkhei shalom, the "ways of peace"). It is foundational to the concept of covenantal society: society as an ethical enterprise constructed on the basis of mutual responsibility.

THUS FAR, deliberately, I have left the word tzedakah untranslated. It cannot be translated, and this is not accidental. Civilizations differ from one another in their structure of ideals, even their most fundamental understandings of reality. They are not different ways of saying or doing the same things, mere "garments", as it were, covering the same basic modes of existence. If we seek to understand what makes a civilization distinctive, the best place to look is at the words that are untranslatable. Aristotle's Athens, for example, contained the concept of the megalopsuchos, the "great-souled man" who, gifted with honour, wealth and rank, conducted himself with the dignity and pride that only came with such endowments. The very word is untranslatable into a system like Judaism that values humility and the kind of dignity that attaches to the person as such, regardless of their income or social position.

Tzedakah cannot be translated because it joins together two concepts that in other languages are opposites, namely charity and justice. Suppose, for example, that I give someone £100. Either he is entitled to it, or he is not. If he is, then my act is a form of justice. If he is not, it is an act of charity. In English (as with the Latin terms *caritas* and *iustitia*) a gesture of charity cannot be an act of justice, nor can an act of justice be described as charity. Tzedakah is therefore an unusual term, because it means both.

It arises from the theology of Judaism, which insists on the difference between possession and ownership. Ultimately, all things are owned by G-d, creator of the world. What we possess, we do not own – we merely hold it in trust for G-d. The clearest example is the provision in Leviticus: 'The land must not be sold permanently because the land is Mine; you are merely strangers and temporary residents in relation to Me' (Leviticus 25:23).

If there were absolute ownership, there would be a difference between justice (what we are bound to give others) and charity (what we give others out of generosity). The former would be a legally enforceable duty, the latter, at best, the prompting of benevolence or sympathy. In Judaism, however, because we are not owners of our property but merely guardians on G-d's behalf, we are bound by the conditions of trusteeship, one of which is that we share part of what we have with others in need. What would be regarded as charity in other legal systems is, in Judaism, a strict requirement of the law and can, if necessary, be enforced by the courts.

The nearest English equivalent to tzedakah is the phrase that came into existence alongside the idea of a welfare state, namely social justice (significantly, Friedrich Hayek regarded the concept of social justice as incoherent and self-contradictory). Behind both is the idea that no one should be without the basic requirements of existence, and that those who have more than they need must share some of that surplus with those who have less. This is fundamental to the kind of society the Israelites were charged with creating, namely one in which everyone has a basic right to a dignified life and equal worth as citizens in the covenantal community under the sovereignty of G-d.

TZEDAKAH CONCERNS NOT JUST PHYSICAL NEEDS but psychological ones also. The rabbis gave the following interpretation of the key sentence in this week's sedra, "Be open-handed and freely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks":

Sufficient for his need – means that you are commanded to maintain him, but you are not commanded to make him rich. That which he lacks – means even a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him. It is told of Hillel the elder [head of the Jewish community in the first century BCE] that he bought for a certain poor man of good family a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him. On one occasion he could not find a slave to run before him, so he himself ran before him for three miles. The first provision ('sufficient for his need') refers to an absolute subsistence level. In Jewish law this was taken to include food, housing, basic furniture and if necessary, funds to pay for a wedding. The second ('that which he lacks') means relative poverty – relative, however, not to others but to the individual's own previous standard of living. This is an indication of something which plays an important role in the rabbinic understanding of poverty. Beyond sheer physical needs is a psychological dimension. Poverty humiliates, and a good society will not allow humiliation.

Protecting dignity and avoiding humiliation was a systematic element of rabbinical law. So, for example, the rabbis ruled that even the richest should be buried plainly so as not to shame the poor. On certain festive days girls, especially those from wealthy families, had to wear borrowed clothes, 'so as not to shame those who do not have.' The rabbis intervened to lower the prices of religious necessities so that no one would be excluded from communal celebrations. Work conditions had to be such that employees were treated with basic respect. Here, the proof text was G-d's declaration, 'For to Me the children of Israel are servants' – meaning that they were not to be treated as servants of any human being. Freedom presupposes self-respect, and a free society will therefore be one that robs no one of that basic human entitlement.

One element of self-respect is independence. This explains a remarkable feature of tzedakah legislation. Maimonides lists the various levels of giving-to-others, all except one of which involve philanthropy. The supreme act, however, does not:

The highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of one who assists a poor person by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment - in a word by putting him in a situation where he can dispense with other people's aid. With reference to such aid it is said, "You shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler, he shall live with you" (Leviticus 25: 35), which means strengthen him in such a manner that his falling into want is prevented. This ruling is the result of a profound wrestling, within Judaism, with the fact that aid in the form of charity can itself be humiliating for the recipient. (One of the most powerful expressions of this is to be found in birkat hamazon, the Grace after Meals, when we say, "We beseech You, G-d our Lord, let us not be in need of the gifts of men or of their loans, but only of Your helping hand . . . so that we may not be put to shame nor humiliated for ever and ever"). Aid can also create welfare dependency, reinforcing, not breaking the cycle of deprivation. The greatest act of tzedakah is therefore one that allows the individual to become self-sufficient. The highest form of aid is one that enables the individual to dispense with aid.

Humanitarian relief is essential on the short term, but in the long run, job creation and the promotion of employment are more important.

In this context, one detail of Jewish law which is particularly fascinating. It specifies that even a person dependent on tzedakah must himself or herself give tzedakah. On the face of it, the rule is absurd. Why give X enough money so that he can give to Y? Giving to Y directly is more logical and efficient. What the rabbis understood, however, is that giving is an essential part of human dignity. As an African proverb puts it: the hand that gives is almost uppermost; the hand that receives is always lower. The rabbinic insistence that the community provide the poor with enough money so that they themselves can give is a profound insight into the human condition.

With its combination of charity and justice, its understanding of the psychological as well as material dimensions of poverty, and its aim of restoring dignity and independence, not just meeting needs, tzedakah is a unique institution. It is deeply humanitarian, but it could not exist without the essentially religious concepts of Divine ownership and social covenant. The prophet Jeremiah says of king Josiah, 'He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is this not to know Me?' says the Lord.' To know G-d is to act with justice and compassion, to recognise His image in other people, and to hear the silent cry of those in need.

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Chapter 8 from The Tzedakah Treasury An anthology of Torah teachings on the mitzvah of charity - to instruct and inspire
By **Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer**

The Poor Man's Portion Is on Deposit With the Rich

Economic Disparity Provides

Opportunities for Charity

G-d Almighty has no lack of resources. He could easily have created a world of universal wealth, wherein everyone was wealthy and no one was poor. Why did He not do so? This question was posed to G-d by King David. The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 31:5) records the following dialogue based on a verse in Psalms 61:8. David said to the Holy One, Blessed is He, "Equalize Your world! Why must there be such a huge economic disparity between the rich and the poor?" G-d replied: "If I make all men economically equal, who will practice kindness and charity?"

R' Yerucham Levovitz of Mir explained: G-d did not create the precept of charity because he saw that there were poor people in the world who needed help. Rather, the exact opposite is true. G-d purposely created poor people in order to give men of means an opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah. A world devoid of opportunities to show kindness to others is inconceivable; compassion is the purpose of this world.

The Wealthy Man Is a Treasurer

The Torah introduces the mitzvah of tzedakah in these words: When there shall be in your midst a poor person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities... (Deuteronomy 15:7). The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh notes that the phrase in your midst is superfluous, and attempts to explain its meaning. First of all the phrase teaches us that we should never look down condescendingly at poor people and treat them as inferior ne'er-do-wells. We must remember that the reason they suffer poverty is for our sake! Since the Almighty wished to provide you with the opportunity to gain the merit of charity, He purposely made some people poor and strategically placed them in your midst so that you could easily perform this mitzvah. Always remember that the charity you give is far more for your own sake than for the pauper's. Never forget that as shabby and miserable as the poor man looks he is nevertheless from one of your brothers – not merely a plain brother, but from one of your outstanding brethren, who is only suffering poverty for your sake.

A second explanation of the phrase, in your midst, is that the wealthy man should not view the pauper as a stranger who is begging to receive money which is not his. To the contrary, the rich man is the treasurer into whose hands the poor man's portion has been deposited for safekeeping.

Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (commentary to Exodus 22:24) elaborates on this subject and makes it clear that any extra money which a rich man has beyond his actual needs is definitely not his own and was not given to him to hoard and save. This money belongs to the poor and the Almighty has merely accorded him the privilege to be His agent to disburse the money to those who need it and 'own' it. G-d did not give the money to the pauper directly because he is being punished for his misconduct; he must suffer the degradation and deprivation which is the lot of the

poor. Thus, the concept of charity has two benefits: It brings merits to the rich and effects atonement for the poor.

G-d Has Made the One to Parallel the Other

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 34:5) states: R' Tanchum bar Chiya began, Be pleased when things go well, but in a time of misfortune, reflect: 'God has made the one to parallel the other' (Koheles 7:14). When you observe that your friend has fallen upon hard times while you continue to prosper, reflect that there is surely a relationship between the two events and that G-d is offering you an opportunity to gain merit by supporting your fallen friend. R' Tanchum bar Chiya learned this lesson from his mother. Whenever she went out to the marketplace to buy him a pound of meat, she always purchased not one, but two; one pound of meat for her son, and an equal amount for the poor. She fully realized that, 'God has made the one to parallel the other.' He only made some people poor so that others could have the privilege and merit to support them!

It All Belongs to G-d

The Tur writes in his introduction to the Laws of Tzedakah (Yoreh Deah 247): Never allow your mind to entertain the perverse thought, 'I can't afford to give charity to others, it will diminish what I have for myself!' Because one must never forget that his money does not belong to him in the first place – it all belongs to God, Who has temporarily deposited His money with you for safekeeping. When a poor person asks for help it is as if G-d is requesting you to pay out His money into the hand of this needy representative. Indeed, the most precious part of your wealth is what you give to the poor, as it says (Isaiah 58:8): And your charity shall go before you [to your eternal reward].

Money Is a Divine Gift

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7) teaches: "This is the absolute rule: Three outstanding gifts were put into this world. If a person is fortunate enough to be endowed with any one of them, he has acquired the most precious treasure in the world. He who is blessed with wisdom, has everything! He who is blessed with extraordinary strength, has everything! He who is blessed with wealth, has everything! When are these gifts a blessing? When they are bestowed by heaven and earned through the merit of Torah. But the strength and wealth acquired by mortals of flesh and blood are worthless. Furthermore, when these gifts do not come from the Holy One, Blessed is He, they will not endure and are destined to be abruptly terminated. There were two fabulously wealthy men – one a Jew, Korach; the other, a gentile, Haman – and both were utterly destroyed. Why? Because their wealth was not a gift from the hand of God; rather, they grabbed their money for themselves!"

The explanation of this Midrash is as follows: Everything that we possess comes to us from the hand of God. What is the difference between the 'gift-taker' and the 'grabber'? The 'gift-taker' humbly and gratefully acknowledges that G-d bestowed everything he owns, whereas the proud and foolish 'grabber' deludes himself and attributes his prosperity to his own efforts. Vast sums of money pass through the hands of the bank teller every day, yet he is well aware that not a penny of this belongs to him; he is merely part of a distribution system which gives out the money to its rightful owners. Similarly, the humble 'gift-taker' controls large sums of money but fully realizes that G-d put the money in his hands for him to distribute to the worthy recipients who are its rightful owners. Like the humble bank teller, the 'gift-taker' takes only a modest salary for himself. The 'grabber,' however, credits himself for his success and therefore selfishly hoards his hard-earned wealth. Therefore, his prosperity will be short lived, and others will grab it from his hands.

Learn a Lesson From the Heart

King Solomon wisely noted the relationship between charity and the heart: A tender heart brings healing of the flesh, but envy brings rotting of the bones. One who robs the poor disgraces his Maker, but he who is gracious to the destitute honors Him (Proverbs 14:30,31).

Alshich explains the lesson contained in these verses: The heart is called 'the king of all organs' because it pumps essential, life-giving, blood to every part of the body. Why did the Creator design the body in this fashion that one organ should control the fate of all the others? In order for men to learn the lesson of tzedakah from their own flesh!

The man who possesses wealth resembles the heart. It is clear that the blood which the heart pumps all over the body is not its own – it belongs to the entire body. Similarly, the extra money which the rich man has beyond his personal needs is not his at all. His function is to act as a pumping station to circulate and distribute the money to all that need it. Furthermore, just as all the limbs and organs of the body are not ashamed to receive the blood the heart pumps to them because it is rightfully theirs, so too, the poor should not be embarrassed when they receive their rightful portion from the rich.

This is the message of the aforementioned verses: A tender [generous] heart brings healing [blood] of the flesh [all other limbs and organs], but envy [selfishness and stinginess hold back the vital flow of blood and] brings rotting of the bones. [Similarly, the rich man who refuses to circulate his wealth is] One who robs the

poor [and] disgraces his Maker [because he repudiates God's welfare system], but he who is gracious to the destitute honors Him.

When You Have More Than Enough

Chovos Halevovos (Shaar HaBitachon, Chapter 5; 'The Fourth Advantage of Faith') explains how a man of true faith acts differently with his money: The man who sincerely trusts in Hashem knows that every penny he receives comes directly from the hand of G-d for a specific purpose. When he finds that he has more money than he needs for his expenses, he knows that G-d has given him this surplus for a good reason. He does not stash the money away and save it for the proverbial 'rainy day.' Rather, he enthusiastically gives the money away to others who are in need. He divests himself of these 'extra' funds with a generous spirit and a joyous heart, because he knows that this is why G-d gave him a surplus and that this distribution will be pleasing in the eyes of the Almighty.

However, the man of meager faith never has enough. You could give him the entire world and the fullness thereof and yet he would feel that he does not have enough for all his needs. He fails in fulfilling his obligations to G-d and to his fellow man because he would rather hoard his money than share it. Ultimately, he will lose his wealth and nothing will remain. All this is summed up in the wise words of King Solomon who said: There is one who scatters [his wealth to charity] yet he gathers more [wealth than he gives away], and there is one who refrains from giving what is proper, only to realize a loss (Proverbs 11:24).

Chovos Halevovos (Shaar Yichud Hamaaseh, Chapter 5) offers a vivid description of how the Evil Inclination makes every effort to discourage a person from giving charity: When you want to give money to the poor, the Evil Inclination will make an all-out effort to convince you that this donation will put you in grave financial danger. He will conjure in your mind images of abject poverty and he will show you how miserable you will look when you yourself are reduced to penury. The Evil Inclination will attempt to convince you that any donation is simply beyond your means. The only way to refute his arguments is to remember the rule: If G-d has given me extra money which I have no use for right now, then most probably G-d wants me to give it away to charity.

What Terrified the Chofetz Chaim

R' Naftoli Neuberger of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel of Baltimore told me the following story:

Once someone noticed that the Chofetz Chaim was fasting on a regular weekday, which was out of character for him despite his extraordinary piety and holiness. This individual pressured the tzaddik to explain why he was fasting. The Chofetz Chaim explained that it was a taanis chalom, a fast in response to having a bad dream. The man continued to pressure the Chofetz Chaim to reveal more details. "Rebbe, what was so bad about your dream that you are doing something so drastic as to fast on account of it?" The Chofetz Chaim felt compelled to reveal the dream's content. "It was really a 'shrecklicher cholom,' a terrifying nightmare! I actually dreamt that I became a rich man!" The curious questioner continued to ask, "Nu, Rebbe, what is so terrible about becoming a rich man?" "Oy vey!" cried the Chofetz Chaim, "Being rich is an awesome responsibility! If I have a lot of money that means that I must distribute a great deal of tzedakah. Do you have any idea how hard it is to distribute tzedakah properly? And do you realize how much time and effort it takes? It would take me so much time that I would hardly have any time left for Torah study! Believe me, for me, wealth is a nightmare."

The Chofetz Chaim paused for a moment and added, "The truth of the matter is that there was something even more terrifying about that dream. The Gemara teaches that we dream at night about the things we think about by day. If I dreamt about money at night that means that I've been thinking about money all day! Woe unto me that it is money and not Torah that is occupying my thoughts throughout my waking hours!"

The Responsibility of the Rich

R' Yisroel Salanter considered the possession of money a great responsibility. Therefore, when R' Yisroel's wife once purchased a lottery ticket, he immediately summoned two men to be witnesses, and he made a formal statement to his wife in their presence: "I hereby declare that I have nothing to do with your monetary acquisitions or with any interest which accrues to it forever."

R' Yisroel did this because he was concerned lest his wife win the lottery and become wealthy. "When Hashem grants riches to someone," explained R' Yisroel, "it is not exclusively for that man's personal benefit. The wealth makes its owner into a gabbai tzedakah, responsible for sharing it with the poor. Who can accept such a heavy burden? It requires searching every corner of the city to discover whether someplace there is a pauper in distress or a youngster whose family lacks the funds to hire a teacher to teach him Torah. Who can find them all?"

Unwilling to face the tremendous challenge and obligation of wealth, R' Yisroel hastened to free himself from all rights to his wife's potential lottery winnings! (R' Ephraim Zaitchik, Hameoros Hagedolim).

Caring and Sharing With Others

R' Yisroel Salanter expressed his wonder that people do not realize what an immense obligation they have to help others. Many people worry about helping their friends do a mitzvah, but do not care about their material well-being. "Many times," said R' Yisroel, "I have seen a person pass a shul, and the people inside call out to him, 'Kedushah! Kedushah! Please come in and join us!' But I have yet to see a person pass by a house where a seudah [a meal] is being served, and the people eating at the table call out to the passerby, 'Seudah! Seudah! Please come inside and join us!'" (Hameoros Hagedolim).

Share Everything With the Poor

Charity is not limited to sharing money or material resources with the poor. One must share everything he has with the needy in order to improve their lot.

A pauper once poured his broken heart out to R' Yisroel Salanter. His cupboards were bare and there was nothing for his family to eat. He decided that the best way to support himself would be to become an itinerant maggid, a public speaker who travels from town to town inspiring and entertaining people with his clever sermons. The only problem with this plan was that the pauper had absolutely no experience or expertise in public speaking! What did R' Yisroel do? He devoted a few hours of his precious time to this man and taught him a number of good sermons for his repertoire. He practiced them over and over again with the pauper until he was satisfied that he could say over these sermons very well (Hameoros Hagedolim).

Please Do Not Make Me Rich!

The famous Maggid of Jerusalem, R' Sholom Mordechai HaKohen Schwadron, once related an interesting story about R' Yisroel Salanter. On a certain occasion, R' Yisroel remarked that he thanked Hashem for not having made him a rich man.

"Wealth is a heavy burden," R' Yisroel said. "I have a neighbor who lives in abject poverty. During the winter he trembles with cold, day and night. His children walk around wearing torn shoes. His wife, after childbirth, requires several glasses of milk every day, but there is nothing. If they will ask me in the heavenly court why I did not help this family enough, I will have a partial excuse: I, too, do not have a penny.

"No, it is not a full excuse. But it is a partial one, and even half an excuse is better than none. If I were rich, however, I would undoubtedly get a sharp rebuke: 'Your neighbor is drowning in anguish, and you are hiding your gold under your floorboards?' How would I respond to such a simple accusation?"

As he finished relating this story, R' Sholom grew emotional. He went on to describe, vividly and at length, the great responsibility that the rich bear. Suddenly, he raised his voice, "Ah, ah, R' Yisroel Salanter was right!" and continued to expound on the truth of R' Yisroel's words. Then he lifted his eyes heavenward and cried out, "Ribbono Shel Olam – don't make me rich!"

R' Sholom was silent for a moment. Then he smiled and said, "You're a smart one. If I were to ask you right here and now, to say what I just said, out loud – to ask HaKadosh Baruch Hu in front of this entire group not to make you rich – you would refuse to do it. Why? Because you would be afraid that Hashem might actually grant your request. But I, I am not afraid!" He raised his voice once again and cried out, "Ribbono Shel Olam, don't make me rich!" (Voice of Truth, p. 246).

The Rich Are Addicted to Their Money!

The Chofetz Chaim would caution the poor not to judge the rich too harshly when they failed to give charity properly. The kindly Sage of Radin had this to say in their favor: "Once I witnessed this scene while I was in Vilna. I saw a man lying dead drunk right in the middle of the street. All the little street urchins were dancing around this pitiful figure and mocking him for his despicable, drunken state. One adult passed by and saw the drunken man sprawled out in the public thoroughfare and addressed him with a smile on his face: "Woe unto you, my friend, you have no idea what your intoxication has done to you! If I would get drunk, I would at least attempt to salvage my self-respect! I would make sure not to drop down dead drunk in the middle of the street!" The critical passerby fails to realize that once a person is drunk, he has no control over his actions.

"Similarly", said the Chofetz Chaim, "many people accuse the wealthy of terrible stinginess, and claim that if only they were rich they would certainly donate huge amounts to charity. However, these people forget that they are making these generous claims now, when they are still poor, and their hearts are soft and sensitive. Little do these folks realize that the minute they become rich their hearts undergo a dramatic transformation and they become hard and tough. Their open hands close and they become tight fist. Why? Because wealth can easily become addictive, just like alcohol! You will never comprehend why rich men act as they do until you become rich yourself!"

He Who Makes Him Poor Can Make Him Rich

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 34:4) warns: When the poor man stands before the rich and begs, "Please give me!" and the man of means refuses to give, remember – He Who made this man poor can make him rich, and He Who made this man rich can make him poor! Beware, lest the rich man scorn the impoverished man and say, "Why don't you go out to work and earn a living? Just look at yourself! What thick thighs you have! What strong feet you have! What a fat belly you have! You are big and strong – go to work!" Says the Holy One, Blessed is He, "Not only didn't you

give him anything to live on, you cursed him with your evil eye! Therefore, your punishment shall be two-fold. The money you selfishly hoarded for yourself will be lost, and you will never bequeath it to your children. Moreover, because you begrudged the poor man his good health and strong body, therefore, your health and strength will be sapped from you."

Bad Money Destroys the Good

The Talmud (Kesubos 66b) teaches: Once Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was riding on a donkey leaving the city of Jerusalem and his students were walking behind him. He saw a young woman who was gathering barleycorns from the dung-droppings left by the animals of Arabs. When this impoverished young woman saw the great sage, she respectfully covered her face with her hair and approached him with a plea, "O Rabbi, please sustain me!" Rabban Yochanan asked her, "My daughter, who are you?" She replied, "I am the daughter of Nakdimon ben Gurion." The Rabbi continued to inquire, "My daughter, the wealth of your father – where has it gone?" She responded, "Rabbi, do they not say this proverb in Jerusalem: 'The only way to salt money is to give it away? The only way to guarantee that you will keep your money is by giving your money to charity!'" [But Nakdimon ben Gurion did not disburse charity properly and therefore he lost all of his money.] Rabban Yochanan persisted in his questioning: "But you had money not only from your rich father, but also from your wealthy father-in-law, what happened to that?" Sadly, the young woman replied, "Rabbi, the bad money was mixed together with the good money and destroyed it!" She continued: "Rabbi, do you remember when you signed on my kesubah, my marriage contract?" Rabban Yochanan turned to his students and related, "Indeed, I remember when I signed on her kesubah and read that her father gave her one million golden dinarim in addition to the enormous sum given by her father-in-law."

The Talmud concludes: How can anyone say that Nakdimon ben Gurion did not give charity? Have we not learnt in a Baraisa: "They would say about Nakdimon ben Gurion that when he walked from his residence to the House of Study they would roll out an exquisite silk runner before him and he would allow the poor to walk behind and pick up the expensive material for themselves." The Talmud offers two possible answers as to why Nakdimon's charity was wanting. "If you wish, you may say that all the charity Nakdimon gave was only for the sake of his own honor; or if you wish, you may say that even if he gave charity with the proper intention, he did not give enough for a person of his tremendous means; as the folk saying goes: "According to the camel, the load."

Cursed and Unkosher Money

The Chofetz Chaim (Ahavas Chesed, Part II, Chapter 7) says that Nakdimon's tragic fall proves that even if a person does perform some charity with his money, but not in accordance with his means, not only will he lose his wealth, but a curse will be attached to it. If other people engage in a business venture with him, their money will also be lost.

R' Meir Bergman of Bnei Brak observes that this story teaches us that whenever a person earns any amount of money he should literally consider it as unkosher, unfit for any personal use, until it is properly tithed and the appropriate amount of charity is separated from it. Moreover, untithed money is like 'treif' meat to the point that when untithed money is mixed together with tithed money it actually contaminates the 'kosher' money, deprives it of blessing, and poisons it with a curse! The only way to secure money is to share it.

See Giving Properly for an additional story about Nakdimon regarding giving for glory.

Selfish Money Smells

Meor Einayim (Parshas Matos) writes that anyone who has developed a spiritually sensitive sense of smell can easily discern money which has not been properly tithed. It gives off a most offensive odor like rotten, putrid meat which was not properly salted! "How foolish and misguided are those who hoard their money in order to feel secure. They are afraid to give away money for tzedakah lest this 'loss' deplete their 'nest egg.' Without charity their money is like unsalted meat which will surely go to waste. But the more they give away to charity the better preserved and protected their money is."

G-d Invented Charity in Order to Save Us From Gehinnom

The wicked Turanus Rufus, the cruel Roman governor of the conquered land of Israel, asked this very same question of R' Akiva: "If your G-d is a lover of the poor, for what reason does He not sustain them?" To this R' Akiva replied: "God makes people needy in order that, through our giving them charity, we may be saved from the judgment of Gehinnom."

Turanus Rufus said to R' Akiva, "On the contrary! This giving of charity is what actually condemns you to be punished in Gehinnom! I shall illustrate this concept for you with a parable. To what is this matter similar? It is analogous to a human king who was angry at his servant. He had the servant incarcerated in a dungeon and ordered that no one feed him or give him drink. Subsequently, one man defied the king's orders and fed the imprisoned servant and gave him to drink. When the king

hears about this man's actions, is he not angry at the man? You Jews are called servants of God, as it says, For unto Me the Children of Israel are servants! (Leviticus 25:55). Hence, by giving charity you actually violate the edict of God, your King, and so through charity you incur the judgment of Gehinnom."

R' Akiva said to Turanus Rufus: "I shall illustrate the situation for you with a different parable. To what is this matter of giving charity similar? It is analogous to the case of a human king who was angry at his son. He had the son incarcerated in a dungeon and ordered that no one feed him or give him drink. Subsequently, one man defied the king's orders and fed the imprisoned son and gave him to drink. When the king hears about this man's actions, does he not send the man a gift? Although the king imprisoned his son, we know that he did not want his son to die, for no normal father ever desires to kill his child. Thus, although the son's misconduct may have compelled the king to imprison his son, he would undoubtedly reward anyone who sustained his child. And we Jews are called sons of God, as it is written, Sons are you to Hashem, your G-d (Deuteronomy 14:1). Thus, although we are imprisoned in exile, the Jews are still God's children, and one who sustains the poor among them with gifts of charity earns God's gratitude and is thus absolved from the judgment of Gehinnom.

Turanus Rufus objected to this explanation and said to R' Akiva: "You Jews are called God's 'children' in one verse and are called His 'servants' in another verse. The explanation for this seeming discrepancy is that at the time that you fulfill the Omnipresent's will you are called His 'children' and it is appropriate to give charity to the poor among you. But when you do not do the will of the Omnipresent, you are called His 'servants,' and do not merit charity. And now, at this present time, you are obviously not doing the will of the Almighty, for He has subjugated you to the Romans! It is therefore improper for you to give charity to the poor at this time."

R' Akiva, however, countered this argument of Turanus Rufus and said to him: "Behold, Scripture states: You will break your bread for the hungry, and the wailing poor you will bring to the house (Isaiah 58:7). When does the verse and the wailing poor you will bring to the house apply? Certainly it refers to the present situation when the Roman government impoverishes us and makes us miserable with unbearable taxes. And yet the verse states that even in such difficult times you will break your bread for the hungry! Scripture thus teaches that G-d desires us to give charity even when we have earned His condemnation because of our transgressions."

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Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
mailed-by shemayisrael.com
PARSHAS RE'EH

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. (11:26)
The word re'eh, see, is written in lashon yachid, the singular form, while the word lifneichem, before you, is written in lashon rabim, the plural form. Why? Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that while the Torah is speaking to the rabim, wider community, at times the yachid, individual, must make a critical decision to act counter to the rabim. Hashem wants each individual to look at the mitzvah, the endeavor, the situation, with a critical eye and act in consonance with that which the Torah dictates - even if the community does not agree. Indeed, sometimes the individual must stand up against the community. A community is comprised of individuals. Thus, each member of the community has his own moral and spiritual imperative to do the right thing - even if it is not a popular or accepted decision. Some individuals are afraid to make waves, to rock the boat, to do his own thing. To him the Torah says: "Re'eh," in the singular, you, individual see, on your own, without the effects of communal pressure. Nothing is wrong with being in the minority - when one is right. The Jewish nation has had this experience throughout the millennia. Avraham Avinu stood up against a world of idol worshippers. Our Torah leadership, throughout the generations, has followed suit, doing what is necessary to uphold the faith against tremendous pressure and overwhelming odds.

One should never belittle the efforts of an individual - even in his own eyes. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, attempts to dissuade the individual from taking action, challenging whether one person can really accomplish anything. Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, comments that one should view the

entire world as if it is on a scale with an even balance of virtue versus demerit. One act of virtue, one positive act, can change the balance in favor of z'chus, merit. We will never know the consequences until we make the attempt.

Re'eh, see, does not just mean to glance at something. It means to delve into the matter and take note of what one observes. In this sense, Rav Baruch understands the Torah's admonition to look deeply into the concept of blessing and curse, to understand the reality and true definition of blessing and curse and to choose cautiously. At a simple? perfunctory glance, one might misconstrue blessing for curse and confuse the two. To all appearances, a life filled with accumulating the various material pleasures that this world has to offer is a life of blessing. Success is to be measured by pleasure and more pleasure. According to this perspective, the life of one who is cloistered, who is sheltered from the moral decay of contemporary society, who lives a lifestyle in which values are measured on a spiritual -- rather than on a physical -- scale, is a life of curse. After all, what kind of enjoyment does he have? Where is his pleasure?

If one delves with a discerning eye, however, he "sees" a completely different vision. He sees what true pleasure is, how to define enjoyment, what is lasting and what is temporary. We can demonstrate the variegated approaches to "seeing" something at face value versus intrinsic worth. Let us take the concept of death, for example. Mortality is a sobering and frightening concept, an idea that catalyzes two approaches. Some say: "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die." We do not live forever, so we might as well enjoy it while we can, and cram in every type of pleasure that is humanly possible. After all, we only live once. This hedonistic attitude is regrettably prevalent in today's culture and society. Another approach is one that takes into consideration that life truly is not forever. Thus, we must prepare ourselves for the time in which we will have to take our final journey. Are we prepared? Surely, indulging in every form of moral decadence is not the way to pack our bags for that journey. When one thinks about death, he should realize the value of life. People make the mistake of thinking that life is a destination, when, in fact, it is only a journey. It all depends on how one "sees."

You are children to Hashem, your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves...for a dead person. (14:1)

One of the many detestable practices employed by the pagans was to cut themselves as a sign of mourning. This expression of grief is abominable. A Jew should understand that, as children of Hashem, we have a special relationship that does not allow us to act in such a manner. In contrast, our perspective on death is quite different than that of the world around us. Death is the bridge that we must traverse in order to gain access to Olam Habah, the World to Come. Grief is certainly a natural outlet for the loss that we feel, but everything - even grief - has a limit. To lose control to the point that one mutilates his body is carrying grief too far, manifesting a distorted view of death and mourning.

Indubitably, one's faith in Hashem can best be measured during a period of travail. The vicissitudes of life challenge one's true conviction. When life is filled with sunshine, and everyone has a rose garden in his backyard, it is quite easy to declare one's emunah, faith, in Hashem. When the road of life becomes filled with obstacles, one displays his true character. In Sefer Tehillim 92:3, David HaMelech writes, "To relate Your kindness in the dawn and Your faith in the darkness." The true test of faith is to maintain one's belief even during periods of darkness.

The Zohar HaKadosh relates, "All songs are holy; [Shlomo HaMelech's] Shir HaShirim is Kodesh Kodoshim, Holy of Holies." What is the significance of Shir HaShirim such that it towers over all other songs of praise? Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, explains that Klal Yisrael sang their other songs at a time of redemption, success, or freedom. Shlomo HaMelech, however, wrote his famous Song of Songs to express his praise to the Almighty specifically at a time of hikuni; He hit me, pitzuni; He

wounded me, periods of exile, pain and travail. This is a true expression of faith.

The Belzer Rebbe, Horav Aharon, zl, lost his entire family during the Holocaust. His chassidus was decimated to the point that he was lucky to put together a minyan, quorum, of followers. Yet, he refused to comment about the tragedy. Many a time, his close followers begged to hear about what had occurred, but he refused to speak. He would relate, however, the many miracles that took place during his personal rescue from Europe. In fact, he decided to celebrate his survival with a seudas hodaah, a festive meal of thanksgiving to Hashem. His chassidim were surprised that he would do such a thing after having sustained the decimating tragedy of the loss of his family and his European chassidim. After pressing him a number of times for an explanation, he finally relented and gave the following response:

The Torah tells us concerning the exodus from Egypt, that Va'chamushim alu Bnei Yisrael me'erezt Mitzrayim. "Bnei Yisrael were armed when they went up from Egypt (Shemos 13:18)." According to the Midrash, the word chamushim, armed, is derived from the word chomesh, a fifth, implying that only one fifth of the Jews left Egypt. The rest were not prepared to begin a new life in a foreign land. They would rather stay in the spiritual depravity of Egypt. As a result of this attitude, they were punished. They died out in a plague during the three days of darkness that enveloped Egypt. Therefore, only a small portion of the great Jewish nation survived Egypt. Yet, we find that after the splitting of the Red Sea, the people sang Shirah, a song of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem. How could they sing with the full knowledge that so many of their brethren had perished in Egypt?

Chazal teach us that from the Torah's vernacular of Az yashir, which means, "Then (he) will sing," rather than Az shir, "Then (he) sang," we derive that Techias ha'meisim, resurrection of the dead, is min haTorah, alluded to in the Torah. What is the meaning of Chazal's statement? They are teaching us a powerful and valuable lesson about life. When a person knows that this world is nothing more than a preparation for a better, external world, for the world of Olam Habah, then he is able to sing shirah, even under the most extreme, painful situations. The fact that the Jews sang shirah to Hashem after leaving Egypt, knowing that they were just the few survivors of a nation of three million men, is proof positive that they understood with clarity of belief that the others were not really gone. This is why I am able to sing shirah, despite the heavy losses that we as a People and I as an individual have sustained. I believe that they have gone on to a better world and that one day we will all be reunited.

Our sages have been proficient in comforting those who are overcome with grief, because they believe what they say and write. They believe unequivocally that the deceased are in Olam Ha'Ba, in a better place. Thus, when they attempt to give solace and comfort to the bereaved, they speak with conviction. The words which emanate from their hearts, enter into the hearts of the bereaved. I take the liberty of sharing unique words of consolation with the reading audience.

In a letter to his sister-in-law and nephews, upon the sudden passing of their husband and father, Horav Yonasan Eybesch?tz, zl, wrote: "You have lost a father of flesh and blood, but you have gained Hashem as your Father, for He is called 'the Father of orphans and Judge of widows. (Tehillim 8:6)' It is a fact that orphans are among the most successful in Torah study, in wisdom, and in fear of Heaven. This is the result of Hashem's special supervision, for He is compassionate to orphans."

In his commentary to Devarim 14:1, the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes, "One must realize that death is not a loss to the deceased - he has simply departed for a different place, similar to a person who travels abroad for an extended stay, but expects to return to see his loved ones again."

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, writes, "If the cessation of the body was the cessation of the man himself, there would be no consolation in mourning, but it is not so! The body ceases, but the person remains alive. Emunah does not recognize death. The deceased is alive; he is aware and feels and is

close to his relatives always. Believe and be faithful and light will then shine upon your ways forever."

Some individuals "claim" that they do not believe in Techias Ha'Meisim - or so they say. Horav Reuven Elbaz, Shlita, relates that he once walked by two men who were in a dispute concerning the veracity of Techias Ha'Meisim. One was observant, the other was not yet observant.

Understandably, the observant Jew posited that there would one day be a resurrection of the dead. The other individual told him that it was impossible, absolutely totally unbelievable. Hearing this statement, Rav Elbaz approached the scoffer and said, "My friend, I promise you that you will not arise during Techias Ha'Meisim!"

"Why do you curse me?" the man asked, somewhat frenzied.

"I am not cursing you!" the rav replied. "After all, you do not believe in Techias Ha'Meisim. Why would it bother you when I assure your exclusion from an event in which you do not believe?"

Any rational person understands what has taken place. As usual, the skeptics claim not to believe. Their lack of belief lasts until they are excluded from an experience, or until they have exhausted all other attempts at validating their disbelief. Everybody seems to turn to Hashem when he enters the emergency room.

Last, I relate an episode cited by Horav Yehudah Tzadakah, zl. The venerable Rosh Yeshivah would relate the following story when he visited with aveilim, mourners. Horav Yisrael Abuchatzzeira, zl, the saintly Baba Sali, had a brother who was referred to as the Baba Yitzchak. He was rav of Ramalah until his untimely, tragic death in a car accident. The Baba Sali was inconsolable. Grief-stricken, he would cry bitter tears during the night. One night, out of sheer exhaustion, he dozed off and his late brother, the Baba Yitzchak, appeared to him, challenging him, "I am in Gan Eden, and you weep?"

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year. (14:22)

The Midrash Tanchuma derives from the compound verb, aseir te'aser, that the second word, te'aser, should be read as te'asher, you will become wealthy. Thus, the Torah is teaching us that if one tithes and gives to the poor, he will become a wealthy man. One should not complain that contributing to charity depletes his portfolio. Hashem will not only make up his losses, this loss will ultimately be the foundation of his material success. This is surprising since we rarely find osher, material wealth, equated with anything positive. Wealth is certainly a wonderful gift from Hashem, but it is one that is fraught with challenges, which many are not able to surmount. Shlomo HaMelech reiterates this idea numerous times in both Sefer Mishlei and Sefer Koheles. Why then would the Torah encourage tithing and add that it will be the precursor of wealth?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, takes a novel approach to explaining the reward of osher. In the Talmud Nedarim 38a, Chazal state that Hashem rests His Presence only on one who is strong, wealthy, wise, humble, etc. Apparently, ashirus, wealth, is one of the criteria for achieving the level of nevuah, prophecy. Clearly wealth is not all negative. What are Chazal trying to tell us? We turn to the Rambam in his Shemoneh Perakim, Perek Shevii, seven, where he states, "A prophet will not prophesy until after he has acquired all of the maalos he'sichliyos, intellectual virtues, and most of the maalos ha'middos, ethical virtues. This is implied by Chazal in the Talmud Shabbos 92a, 'The spirit of prophecy will rest solely on a wise man, who is valiant and wealthy.' The term 'wise man' surely includes all the intellectual virtues. The term 'wealthy' includes all the ethical virtues, for it refers to the quality of histapkus, satisfaction. In Pirkei Avos 4:1 Chazal consider a person who is sameach b'chelko, satisfied with his portion, to be wealthy. This means a person who is happy with what fortune presents him and does not grieve over what fortune does not present him.

This is the underlying idea behind Chazal's statement of aseir bishvil shetiasher, "Tithe so that you will become wealthy." They want a person to develop the middah of histapkus, satisfaction. This is perfected through the

giving of Maaser. When one sets parameters to how much he keeps for himself, when he places limitations on his material and physical objects of desire, and instead shares with others less fortunate than he, he merits acquiring true ashirus, through the medium of the middah of histapkus. It is not in the money. There are people who are extremely wealthy, but not necessarily happy. Happiness is the result of satisfaction - a virtue not acquired through wealth, but through understanding that what one has is a gift from the Almighty, Who has determined how much he needs. When an individual accepts this mindset, he has acquired enormous wealth - something that money cannot buy.

You are children to your G-d, you shall not cut yourselves...for a dead person. (14:1)

Sforno explains that this prohibition is based on the idea that their cutting oneself is a sign that one does not acknowledge the close relationship that Hashem has with him. While it is understandable for an individual to grieve over the loss of a loved one, overly extensive grief that leads to physical mutilation indicates that the individual does not perceive that Someone is even closer to him; Someone Who is of greater significance. We cannot question the validity of the concept that Hashem has a clear Presence in our lives. This is why we wonder about Yaakov Avinu's reaction to Yosef's disappearance. Why did he refuse to be consoled? How did he plummet to such a nadir of depression? Furthermore, when he met Pharaoh, he remarked that his years were "few and bad" (Bereishis 47:9). How could this defeatist attitude prevail? In an individual who had attained such an elevated spiritual relationship with Hashem? How could he complain, knowing full well that "all that Hashem does is for the good"?

Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, explains that Yaakov did not mourn the physical loss of Yosef, but, rather, he mourned his spiritual contribution to the entity known as Klal Yisrael. The Patriarchs were invested with a mission of critical importance: to build Bais Yisrael, the House of Israel, which would serve as the basis l'takein olam b'malchus Shakai, "to perfect the world with the kingdom of Hashem." To achieve this lofty objective, it was necessary to establish a foundation firmly rooted in conviction, characterized by the spiritual qualities that each individual member of this family could contribute. The tree is only as strong as its roots. The family endures on its foundation of values. This is why Yaakov was inconsolable. Klal Yisrael had to be built upon the foundation of twelve shevatim, tribes, each contributing its own unique qualities to the equation. Yosef Hatzadik was irreplaceable. His loss created a spiritual void in the House of Yisrael. The family was blemished. The roots would not be as strong. The tree was weakened. Yaakov had every reason to grieve, to feel that he had failed, that his life was incomplete and unfortunate. He lived with a different set of ideals, measured by a different standard of success. According to his barometer of success, he had failed. This is why he grieved relentlessly. The loss in the spiritual fabric of Klal Yisrael is something from which one does not "recover." .. Sponsored by Etmom & Abigail Rozen & Children in loving memory of their mother and bobbie Mrs. Faiga Rozen Maras Faiga Gittel bas HaRav Nissan Aryeh HaLevi a"h nifteres 27 Menachem Av 5748

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Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Parsha List"

<parshat_hashavua@ots.org.il> to me show details Aug 8 (2 days ago)

SHABBAT SHALOM: PARSHAT RE'EH (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17) 27 Av, 5767 - 11 August, 2007 Efrat, Israel - Besides the obvious material advantages the West offers its citizens, a select number of Jews of Western persuasion has created an ideology out of continuing to live in the Diaspora. They maintain a glorification of the exile based on the notion that living marginally, on the edge of history, allows one to remain aloof from the ugly aspects of society.

So long as Jews are powerless and stateless, (which is what the Jewish position in Christian/Western culture boils down to when the past 2,000 years are taken as a whole), the Jewish people cannot be accused of the cruelties and immoralities other

nations have committed wholesale. Sitting on the sidelines, we don't trample the innocent.

And so Israel, a small country with all kinds of problems, looms on the international horizon as an undesirable trouble spot, forced to deal with thorny moral questions: How to punish terrorists who've been convicted of brutal murders that haven't distinguished between children and soldiers? How to fight a war against katyusha rockets launched from within civilian populations aimed at nothing but the civilian populations in Jewish border towns? How to release terrorists with blood on their hands for captured Israeli soldiers? How to make peace with masked Arab gangs whose guns are often aimed at their fellow Arabs? How to maintain a humanitarian stance towards an enemy whose fanatic hatred begins with mother's milk and doesn't end until the seventy virgins embrace the suicide bomber?

For the ideologues of non-involvement it would seem that the image preferred is the Jew as scholar, rabbi, poet and doctor - the quiet soul, who never raises his voice and therefore doesn't have to risk getting his hands dirtied by the complex business of running a country surrounded by enemies.

In this week's portion, Re'eh, Jews are commanded to kill other Jews if the overwhelming population of a city worships idolatry, a concept which sounds utterly primitive to a modern sensitivity. How can G-d command us to kill a Jewish city? True, we're dealing with idolaters, but we're still dealing with an entire city consisting of men, women and children. The idea is so shocking that it's easy to miss the end of the verse, that "...God will then grant you to be merciful." (Deut. 13:18) What is mercy doing in the heart of such apparent cruelty?

Rabbi Akiva suggests that the very words "God will then grant you to be merciful" means that you are not to kill the children (Tosefta Sanhedrin Chapter 14). However, there are three Talmudic passages which see this passage as a confirmation of compassion, as a fundamental characteristic of the Jewish People:

Tractate Shabbat, 151b - "It is taught: Rabban Gamliel B'Rebi says, 'He will grant you to be merciful, and He will be merciful to you,' teaches that all who are merciful to others are accorded mercy by heaven and all who are not merciful are not accorded mercy by heaven..." Tractate Betza, 32b - "It is taught: [our verse followed by...] All who are merciful to others are assuredly of the seed of our father Abraham, and all who are not merciful are assuredly not of the seed of...Abraham." Tractate Yevamot, 79a - "It is taught: There are three distinguishing signs of the Jewish nation: mercifulness, shamefacedness, and loving-kindness. Mercifulness, as it is written..." and then the quote from our verse in Deuteronomy 13.

What's going on here? A Jewish law of physics: as you do unto others so it will be done unto you? That for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction? A Jewish law of heredity and genetics for identifying Abraham's seed? A third law of social anthropology in terms of distinguishing Jewish behavior? Why all this from a verse in a passage concerning idolatry and decimation? The tension between aspects of mercy and the horrible facts of annihilation is a total shock, so jolting that the reader staggers away in confusion.

The Ohr HaHayim, (Rabbi Haim ben Attar, 1696-1743), pierces through this question by examining what happens to people when they kill. The actual executions may very well lead to a state of blood lust among the killers capable of undoing the very heart of Jewish civilization. By including the verse concerning mercy, the Torah promises that compassion will not be uprooted from the Jews, even if normal peoples would ordinarily be changed by the violence. God's promise is a gift: Jews will not become cruel.

In this light, the Talmudic passages we've quoted reverberate even deeper. Who and what we are as a people - seed of Abraham, loving-kindness, compassionate etc. - not only accompany us in the best of circumstances, but even during the worst. Hopefully, the Torah is presenting a self-fulfilling prophecy: Get your hands dirty, if you must, in the business of establishing a state, but don't forget your fundamental quality of mercy.

Every day in Israel we see the relevance of the Or HaHayim's interpretation. In the war between us and the Palestinians, we are being called upon to do things which are "cruel" in order to protect our innocent civilians, constantly targeted by our enemy. But how many other armies have devoted so much energy toward inventing bullets which maim, but don't kill? Bursting into a house suspected of hiding a cache of weapons may frighten people, but how many armed forces perform such actions with the avowed purpose of not killing the innocent, even at risk to themselves. We do not aerially bomb an entire area we know contain caches of weapons ready to be used against us, we rather go searching house to house, and only target would-be assassins, even if this means risking the lives of our own boys.

During the two intifadas - and even today -- the impossible has taken place. In every Jewish hospital in Israel, Arabs - even Palestinians who were wounded with their hands still clutching their loaded gun-- are given the same excellent medical attention as the Israelis. And I recall an amazing event which could take place only in Israel. An Israeli Jew was murdered by a terrorist Gazan during the second intifada. In the midst of their tragedy, the family opted to donate his heart for a transplant. The

next person in line for a heart was a Palestinian from East Jerusalem. The family agonized and decided to give the heart, never the less.

If we think about it, this Jewish heart may have been foreshadowed in the verse about compassion appearing in this week's portion. Cruelty will not become second nature to us. It's a promise. The Jews will never lose their compassionate hearts. Even in the midst of necessary violence, "God will grant you to be merciful."

[Hebrew words are inverted]

THE ALTER on THE PARSHA

Shmuessen of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, Zt"l, the Alter of Slabodka

Adapted from Sefer Ohr HaTzafun

PARSHAS Re'eh 5767 ישראל חסד

The Torah (ה-ז"ו:ט דברים') teaches תקפץ ולא לבכך את תאמץ לא והעבט לו ירך את תפתח פתח כי. האביון מאחיד ירך את "You shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, you shall open your hand to him, and you shall lend him his needs, whatever is lacking to him." These are the mitzvos of tzedakah and chessed.

One who views tzedakah and the performance of other kindness as an obligation like all other mitzvos in the Torah, is making a great mistake. The Torah begins and ends with chessed - it is its very core and foundation. Even before the Torah was given, man was expected, through intellectual pursuit, to comprehend that his purpose was to do chessed. Yet, just understanding this is not sufficient - to a descendant of Avraham Avinu, chessed means much more.

The Gemara in Beitza (ב"ל) brings the following teaching: "Shabbsai bar Merinos came to Bavel and asked the people for merchandise with which to earn a livelihood and they did not give it to him. He then asked for some food, but they did not feed him. Said Shabbsai, 'These people must be from the Eirav Rav, for the posuk (ה"ג:יג דברים) states, " ורחמך רחמים לך ונתן " - "And Hashem will give you the attribute of mercy..." - this teaches מזרעו שהוא בידוע הבריות על המרחם כל" מזרעו שאינו בידוע הבריות על מרחם שאינו מי וכל אבינו אברהם של "אבינו אברהם של that is a sign that he is a descendant of our father Avraham and whoever does not have compassion on others then that is a sign that he is not from the descendants of Avraham.'" The Rambam states explicitly, "Anyone that possesses a brazenness or cruelty

and hates other people and does not do kindness with them, we suspect him of being from the Givonim (and we can not rely on their Jewish status to permit marriage with them)."

Avraham rose from level to level in the midda of chessed, internalizing it and making it part of his very being. " לאברהם חסד " - "Chessed is to Avraham" - so to say, "Chessed belongs to Avraham - it is his midda". This attribute was transferred to his descendants - chessed is our inheritance, it is part of our nature, integrated into our very being. One who is a Jew, inherently loves kindness and possesses a natural desire to help another person - if he is not doing chessed, then he is battling against his natural inclination. Chessed and the Jew are not two separate entities, he is not a person with an obligation to perform kindness- rather they are one, חסד איש ישראל בן ' - 'a Jew is a man of kindness' - it is his soul. The Gemara in Rosh Hashana (ד) teaches that Koresh (Daryavesh) was originally considered a righteous king who allowed the Jewish people to continue their work on the Beis Hamikdash. When he revealed his ulterior motive and said " מלכא להיי ומצלין " - "in order that they should pray for the life of the king and his children", his act was no longer deemed a chessed and his status was soured. Although his added intention that the Jews should pray for him in the Beis Hamikdash was, in actuality a positive attribute - when a goy has an ulterior motive, that is what drives him and his act cannot be considered a true kindness. A Jew is different. " על לצדקה זו סלע האומר " - "If one says, 'this sela is for tzedakah on condition that my son lives, he is completely righteous - if he is a Jew.'" Rashi in Pesachim (ה) explains that when a Jew gives tzedakah even if his intent is seemingly solely for himself - to receive eternal reward or another ulterior motive - we do not say that he is not acting for the sake of heaven, but that he is fully performing the kindness because of Hashem's commandment and simultaneously having himself in mind. The goy will regret his act if his motive is not fulfilled but the Jew will not. This is because the Jew's deed of kindness stems from his love for chessed embedded deep within his soul - his inheritance from Avraham Avinu. This is the true outlook on the mitzvos of tzedakah and chessed - that every Jew in every generation has this inheritance, a natural inclination for kindness. Our job is to uncover this great character and bring our internal drive to its fruition.

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