

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

AUGUST 12, 2023

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of
Eliyahu ben Moshe Aron Lefkowitz OBM by the Lefkowitz family.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 40

25 AV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS RE'EH

Getting By Giving

You shall truly tithe [...] (14:22).

The Gemara (*Taanis* 9a) records a fascinating conversation between R' Yochanan and his young nephew. R' Yochanan asked his nephew, "Recite to me the Bible verse [you have learned today]." The latter replied, "You shall surely tithe." At the same time, his nephew asked, "What are the meaning of these words?" R' Yochanan answered, "Give tithes that you may be enriched."

The boy then asked, "How do you know this?" R' Yochanan replied: "Go test it [for yourself]." The boy thereupon asked, "Is it permissible to test the Holy One, blessed be He? Do we not have a verse (*Devarim* 6:16) that says, 'You shall not try the Lord?'" R' Yochanan replied, "Thus said R' Oshaia: The case of tithe-giving is excepted [from the prohibition], as it is said (*Malachi* 3:10), 'Bring the tithes unto the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and with this you may test me.'"

In other words, a person can literally test Hashem's promise to enrich those who give *tzedakah*. Even though the general rule is that one may not test the Almighty; the *mitzvah* of giving charity is exempted from this prohibition. Not only is it exempted, but Hashem actually encourages us to test Him by giving charity. Additionally, the Gemara (*Pesachim*

8a) states that if a person says, "I am giving this money in order that my son shall live," he is a complete *tzaddik*. Meaning that even though he is giving the money with an ulterior motive, it is a proper act of *tzedakah* and he is considered righteous.

Why is the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* an exemption to the prohibition of testing Hashem? Furthermore, there is a general rule laid down in *Pirkei Avos* (1:3) that says, "Do not be as a servant serving his master in order to receive reward." So, why is the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* different?

Rashi (*Vayikra* 20:17) explains that the word *chessed* in Aramaic means shame. In prior editions of INSIGHTS it has been explained that Aramaic is the language of understanding another person's perspective. While a person may feel good about sharing his good fortune with others by giving *tzedakah*, one has to also consider the receiver's perspective. In other words, when a person has to accept *chessed* from someone there is a devastating feeling of embarrassment that he cannot take care of his own needs.

This is why we ask Hashem in *bentching*: "Do not cause us to come to need to rely on gifts or loans from others." It is debilitating to one's psyche to have to rely on the largesse of others for survival. Yet, we know



Miami Edition

that giving *tzedakah* and doing *chessed* are key components of one's obligation to "follow in His ways." So how do we reconcile this obligation with the pain being caused to the recipient of *tzedakah*?

This is the reason why Hashem created a system by which the person giving is monetarily enriched by his act of *tzedakah*. Just as a person would not be embarrassed to be paid for giving someone terrific investment advice, so too a person receiving *tzedakah* is providing the giver the opportunity to enrich themselves. In fact, it is better than ordinary investment advice; its success is actually guaranteed by the Almighty. Hashem, in his infinite wisdom, is removing the poor person's shame in receiving *tzedakah* by enabling him to give back to the person giving the *tzedakah*. Perhaps this is why the word "nassan – to give" in Hebrew is a palindrome – a word that reads the same backwards and forward; because the giving goes in both directions.

The Tipping Point

And when you send him out free from you, you shall not let him go away empty handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, and out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress; of that with which Hashem your God has blessed you, you shall give to him (15:13-14).

The Torah charges us with giving a gift to our Jewish servants when they leave our service; the Hebrew word for this is “hanaka.” Rashi (ad loc) explains that this comes from the Hebrew word for adornment. Similarly, the word *anak* is used in scriptures to mean necklace (*Shir Hashirim* 4:9). In fact, giants are called *anakim* because they wear the sun around their neck like a necklace (*Sotah* 34b). Rashi on this verse explains that you have to give the freed slave something that makes it clear that you have given him a gift.

Why are we obligated to give him a gift at all? He had already been paid in advance for all of his years of servitude, why does the Torah place an obligation to bestow him with a parting gift? In addition, this reference to a necklace indicates that he needs to leave our service bejeweled. But what does that really mean? He actually isn’t given jewelry – as the verses go on to explain, and further elucidated in the Talmud and Rambam (*Hilchos Avadim* 3:14) – he receives food and food related items. What is this reference to being bejeweled?

Did you ever wonder why when checking in at a hotel you tip the bell person and chambermaid, but not the person who checked you in? Or when shopping, you tip the person who carries your bags to the car, but not the cashier? When ordering food in a restaurant, you tip the waitress; but if you go to the counter and order, you do not tip the person at the register. Why? When do we instinctively give a tip and when do we not give one? In fact, what is the purpose of giving a tip?

The answer is, we give a tip when someone performs a personal service for us. In other words, these are all situations where we would physically be taking care of ourselves; carrying bags to a car or room, cleaning the room, bringing food to the table, etc. In all of these situations a person has demeaned themselves and acted in our service so that we didn’t have to. One could not check himself into a hotel or a flight – the hotel or airline has to check a person in – therefore no tip is warranted.

A tip is given to restore a person’s dignity. Giving a tip is a statement that we appreciate that someone else is doing something that we would otherwise do for ourselves. The very giving of the gift means that the person isn’t a servant, we have no right to expect the act of them, and we appreciate what they are doing for us.

But perhaps even more important is the lesson in what our attitude toward them should be: If we are obligated to restore someone’s dignity for their act of service, how much more so do we have to speak and relate to them in a kindly fashion during their act of service, and ensure that we do not further diminish their dignity.

That is why the Torah describes it as bejeweling a person even though no jewelry is involved. We want to make sure that the Jewish servant who is leaving our service has a measure of his dignity restored. Meaning, by recognizing him as an individual he is now coming back into the community not as a servant, but as a respected member of society.



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