

GIVING IS RECEIVING

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Naso. The parsha begins with the counting [Naso] of the Bnei Levi [the sons of Levi] and the assigning of the Mishkan-related tasks to be performed by them. Our parsha then moves on to many diverse topics.

"V'ish es kodoshov lo yihyeh [and a man's 'holy things' shall be his].[5:10]" What is meant by these 'holy things'? Rashi explains that the Torah has enumerated many gifts that must be given to the Kohanim [Priests] and the Leviim [Levites]. One might mistakenly think that since these gifts are coming to those individuals, they can forcefully take them. The Torah therefore clearly states that "a man's 'holy things' shall be his." Although he is obligated to give these things to the Kohanim or Leviim, they are his inasmuch as he decides which specific Kohen or Levi to present it to.

Rashi then offers an additional explanation based on the Medrash. One is obligated to give maaser [tithe] to the Levi. (In a strict sense this refers to agricultural produce but the Shulchan Orech [Code of Jewish Law] rules that a person must give one tenth of all types of earnings to charity.) The passuk [verse] is teaching that one who withholds his maaser and doesn't disburse of it properly will ultimately find that his field is only producing one tenth (maaser) of what it had been producing. "And a man's 'holy things,'" that are wrongly withheld, "shall be his"--that tithe amount will become the sum total of all he'll have.

The Tosafos [Taanis 9A] tells of such a situation which actually occurred. There was a wealthy man whose field would annually yield one thousand 'koor' [a certain measurement]. He would unfailingly take one tenth of the produce, one hundred koor, and give it to the Leviim. As he got older and neared his death, he summoned his son. "My son," he said to him, "I want you to know that this field produces one thousand koor each year. Be sure to tithe one hundred koor each year as I used to do." He breathed his last breath and left this world.

The son took over and, as his father had said, the field produced one thousand koor the first year. Following his father's instructions, he tithed one hundred koor. On the second year, the son felt that one hundred koor was much too much to give away. He decided to keep the entire thousand koor of that year's produce for himself.

To his great dismay, the next year was a dismal year and the entire field only yielded one hundred koor. As he was sitting dejected in his house, his relatives, who had heard the entire story, came over to visit him. They explained to him that when the field had first come to him, the arrangement was

that he was the owner and Hashem was the 'Kohen' who received the ten percent for the poor. When he held back Hashem's portion, Hashem 'confiscated' the field making Himself the owner and turning the son into the 'Kohen'. The field therefore only gave him the ten percent that he as the 'Kohen' deserved.

Hashem gives each person a sum of which ninety percent is meant for his usage and ten percent is meant to be disbursed to charities. If one recognizes that and proves himself to be a dependable vehicle through which the charities will receive that which is meant for them, then Hashem will continue to channel that money through him. The Mishna [Avos 4:1] teaches: Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion. One who is happy with the ninety percent that is his portion and acts accordingly will continue to receive that full amount and be wealthy. However, one who isn't satisfied with that portion and therefore dips into the ten percent that was never meant for him, such a person will find that Hashem will choose another 'clearing house' for His funds.

I was recently studying this Mishna with a student who has had a difficult life. He was wondering how he, a product of a broken home with a very difficult financial situation, could really be happy with his portion.

I tried to present him with a different way of viewing his situation. I asked him what would make him really happy--what would he consider to be a remarkable gift for which he'd really thank Hashem. "Winning the lottery," was his quick answer. (At this point I had him exactly where I wanted him.) "One million? Five million?" I asked him. "One hundred million," was his dead-pan response. "For such a gift you'd really owe Hashem big time, really appreciate what you have and have no complaints?" I asked him. He readily agreed.

I then asked him if he'd rather: 1) have a hundred million dollars but be blind, deaf, mute and paralyzed from the neck down or, 2) have his present health along with his present family and financial situation. Once we ruled out the possibility of using fifty million to heal his health problems leaving him with the other fifty to burn, he agreed that he'd rather be in his present situation.

"In other words," I said to him, "you agree that the gifts of vision, speech, hearing and mobility that Hashem has given you are worth more than one hundred million dollars! Meaning, Hashem has already given you gifts worth far more than the most amazing gift you were able to imagine." Although he maintained that he'd still rather have his present health plus the hundred million, the point was clearly seen.

The Ruach Chaim offers an additional insight into this Mishna. "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion.[Avos 4:1]" He explains that a person who views his wealth properly--who has humility in his wealth and doesn't see himself as being any higher or better than those who have less than he--such a person will make sure to use that wealth in order to help others. He will recognize that his true portion, the portion that will be his for eternity and that can never be stolen, lost or devalued, is only the wealth that he gives away for tzeddakah [charity]. Not only does he recognize

that that is his true portion but he's happy with that portion. He feels blessed that he's been chosen to be Hashem's conduit for those funds and he's happy that he con-du-it (sorry). Such a person is truly wealthy. Perhaps not in Wall Street terms but certainly in Jewish terms. He's got the wealth that will stand by him for eternity.

With this, we've been afforded another glimpse at our original passuk: "V'ish es kodoshov lo yihyeh [and a man's 'holy things' shall be his].[5:10]" A man's holy things--that which he uses for holiness, for charitable causes--that alone shall be his.

"Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion.[Avos 4:1]"

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

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The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).
