

NOT ONLY A MITZVAH, BUT GOOD FINANCIAL ADVICE AS WELL

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Emor

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #899 Motrin For Your Children? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Emor contains the pasuk "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely remove the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them, I am Hashem, your G-d." [Vayikra 23:22]

The halacha is that when a person harvests his field, he is bound by 3 positive Biblical commandments called Leket, Shikcha, and Peah. A person must leave over a corner of the field for the poor (Peah). Likewise, he leaves over for the poor gleanings (Leket) – individual stalks that have fallen during the harvest – as well as forgotten sheaves (Shikcha) left in the field mistakenly during the harvest. Throughout the harvest process, a person is required to have the poor and less fortunate in mind constantly.

The Sforno writes in our parsha "After the harvest and the ingathering of the bountiful crop, the Torah gives us a plan by which we may guard our wealth." Hashem guarantees us, in effect, "You take care of them (the poor and the proselytes) and I will take care of you." This is not only a mitzvah – to be a nice person and think of the less fortunate. According to the Sforno, it is "wise counsel" [an eitza tova] as well: Do you want to keep your money? Do you want to be successful? Give it away!

The Sforno uses the expression "the salt of money is its deficit" and refers to a Gemara [Kesuvos 66b]:

It happened with Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai that he was riding on a donkey, exiting Jerusalem,

and his students were walking behind him. He saw a certain maiden who was gathering kernels of barley from between the excrement of animals belonging to Arabs (indicating how desperate she was for food). When she saw him, she covered herself with her hair and stood before him. She said to him, "My master, feed me!" He asked her, "My daughter, who are you?" She answered him, "I am the daughter of Nakdimon ben Guryon" (who the Gemara tells us in other places was a fantastically wealthy individual).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked her, "My daughter where did the money of your father's house go?" She answered him, "My master, do they not say this proverb in Jerusalem, 'the salt of money is its deficit?' (melach mammon cheser)." [In ancient times, salt was a preservative. This is saying that one who wants to "salt his money away" should do so, by giving (some of) it away to the needy.] And others say (that the Baraisa reads) "The salt of money is kindness" (melach mammon chesed). [Rashi explains that his daughter was tacitly admitting that Nakdimon ben Guryon did not give sufficient charity. Even though he in fact did give away large sums of money, the Talmud says that for his level of wealth, he did not give away as much as he should have.]

(Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai then asked her) and where is the money of your father-in-law's house? She answered him, "This came and wiped out that" (Rashi: My father-in-law's money was commingled with my father's money. Thus, when my father lost his money, my father-in-law lost his as well.) She said to him, "My master, do you remember when you signed on my Kesubah?" He said to his students, "I remember when I signed on the Kesubah of this maiden, and I read in it that she brought a million dinars of gold from her father's house besides what was promised her by her father-in-law."

This is what Sforno means when he speaks of "melach mammon cheser". If one wants to keep his money, he should abandon it to the poor and to the proselyte. This is not only a mitzvah; it is good financial advice as well.

This speaks to a phenomenon that Rav Tzadok speaks about as well. Rav Tzadok explains that in spiritual matters, that which is appropriate to do is many times counter-intuitive. B'derech haTeva [by the laws of nature], if a person possesses money and wants to keep it, the person saves the money. It works that way according to the laws of nature. In ruchniyus [spirituality], a different set of cause and effect laws are operative. In physical matters, we know how cause and effect works. However, in spiritual matters, that which seems to us to be counter-intuitive is literally the way things happen. From the perspective of spirituality, a person who wishes to keep his money should not save it. He should rather "give it away". From a financial perspective, based on Derech haTeva, this makes absolutely no sense. However, Rav Tzadok says, Ruchniyus works with a different set of cause and effect rules.

This is the Rabbinic teaching, "Tithe, in order that you become rich" (Aser, bishvil she'tisAsher.) Become wealthy by giving your money away! It sounds ridiculous, but it is only ridiculous according

to the laws of nature. By the laws of spirituality, it is not at all ridiculous.

Rav Tzadok cites another example. The halacha is that when a whole city worships idols (Ir haNidachas), there is a positive Biblical command to wipe out the entire city – men, women, and children. Based on Derech haTeva, what kind of effect would carrying out this command have on those who fulfill it? What does wiping out an entire city do to a person? It is the ultimate act of cruelty. We would expect that such action would make its perpetrators vicious and callous individuals for the rest of their lives. The corrosive effect of such action would likely bring these individuals to kill innocent people as well.

However, contrary to our expectations, the Torah guarantees for those people who carry out the punishment of the Ir haNidachas: "And (Hashem) will grant you mercy and be merciful upon you." [Devorim 13:18] Based on Derech haTeva, would we expect the people to become more compassionate than they were previously? How could that be? The answer is that if you do something for the purpose of a mitzvah, the results will not operate within the laws of nature but with the (sometimes counter-intuitive) laws of spirituality.

I read the following incident involving Rav Yakov Galinsky, zt"l, a famous Maggid in Yerushalayim. After the communist revolution, he and some other Yeshiva students were sent to Siberia together with some baale batim (regular heads of households). When the communists took over, they nationalized all the money in the country. Many people lost their life's fortune when the government took over all the factories and businesses and then sent the former business owners to labor camps in Siberia.

Rav Yakov Galinsky says he was together with some other Yeshiva bochrim and some people who had lost their fortunes. At night after work, the bochrim would gather to daven and learn. Two formerly wealthy factory owners came over to them and told them "You know, we are jealous of you. You still have your faith. You still have your belief system. All we ever had was our money. Now we lost everything and we have nothing."

Then they said an amazing thing. "You know who we have complaints against that we lost everything? We have complaints against the Ponnevezhe Rav and the Kovna Rav. What did they do wrong? We remember when we were wealthy before the communists took over. They came to us to collect money for their Yeshivas and we gave them money. They would tell us, "Listen, you are a wealthy person. The needs of the nation are great. Give us more." We did not give more. We have complaints against them that they were not more forceful with us. They should have put a gun to our heads and said, "Give us more." Had we given more, at least we would have that mitzvah. Now we have nothing. Instead of them putting a gun to our heads and taking our money, which would allow us to retain something (the mitzvah), now the communists put the gun to our heads and we have nothing.

This is the lesson. If a person wants to keep his money, give it away. "One never becomes poor from

giving charity and no evil thing and no damage is caused because of charitable giving..." [Rambam Matanos Aniyim 10:2]. The lesson with spirituality is that spirituality works with a different set of laws than material matters. What may seem to be counter-intuitive in a normal "way of the world" is many times different in a spiritual sense. If you want to keep your money, give it away.

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