

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Re'eh
August 2020 / Av 5780

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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Re'eh – Tithing our time

*** New Gemara for beginners shiur – I am planning to start a new online shiur in Gemara for beginners. B"H I hope to start in a few weeks and the shiur will probably take place on Sunday nights (Australian time). If anyone is interested in joining please send an email to darchai.noam@gmail.com.*

This week's Parsha of Re'eh includes the mitzvah of giving tzedakah.

“If there shall be a destitute person amongst one of your brothers, in one of your cities, in the land that Hashem your G-d gave you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather you shall surely open your hand to him...”
(Devarim 15:7-8)

Giving tzedakah is a fundamental part of Judaism. We are commanded to give between 10% and 20% of our earnings to help those who are less fortunate than us. Hashem guarantees that we will be repaid and He even challenges us to test Him in this matter (see Malachi 3:10).

The following story illustrates the Jewish approach to tzedakah:¹

A meshulach (tzedakah collector) from Israel was travelling through the US collecting money for needy brides. At one point he was pulled over by a policeman for unknowingly breaking a local driving law. He was unfamiliar with local practices. When told that he would have to pay a fine, he immediately pulled out a thick wad of cash and asked the policeman how much he had to pay. The policeman was very suspicious when he saw such a large amount of cash so he took him down to the station for questioning. The man's story was not believable. “Do you mean to say that you approach total strangers and they willingly hand over cash to pay for weddings in another country for brides that they don't know and that you don't know!?” The police checked out the story and found out that it was true. It was a wonderful demonstration of the Jewish approach to tzedakah and became a huge kiddush Hashem.

Just like we are obligated to tithe our money, there is also the idea that we are obligated to tithe our time. In June 1973, Rav Moshe Feinstein issued a call to action to Yeshiva students, asking them to devote 10% of their time to learn Torah with their fellow Jews who had become estranged from Judaism.² Rav Feinstein relied on the precedent of ma'aser (tithing of money) to designate the appropriate amount of time for these activities. Just like we need to generously assist those that are financially suffering, we also need to generously assist others in a spiritual sense.

Let's try to extrapolate the laws of tithing our money and apply them to tithing our time.

Reuven answered the knock on his door and to his dismay he saw a meshulach collecting charity. Embarrassed, Reuven looked at the ground. “This is so awkward,” he said. “I really don't know why you came to me. To be honest, I'm not financially successful. Since I can only

¹ I don't know whether or not this story is true, but in any case I think it's a wonderful story!

² The call to action was published in the Jewish Observer and a copy of the article can be seen here: <http://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/48828/rav-moshe-and-giving-your-time-for-charity>

afford to give you a modest sum, please don't waste your time with me. Why don't you visit my next-door neighbour instead? He is much wealthier than me and will give you much more than I can."

Of course, Reuven's reasoning is illogical. The meshulach will certainly visit Reuven's neighbour as well. Just because his neighbour can give more than Reuven, does not absolve Reuven of his obligation to contribute. Perhaps Reuven's contribution will only pay for one meal for the poor recipient while Reuven's neighbour will be able to cover the rent for a couple of months. But it all adds up and every contribution helps!

Another factor Reuven overlooked is his own spiritual gain from giving tzedakah. If Reuven backed out of doing the mitzva of tzedakah just because someone else could do it better, he is missing out on seizing the opportunity for reward and spiritual growth himself. He would be letting this precious mitzva slip through his fingers.

Let's now apply these concepts to tithing our time. Many people believe that they are not qualified to teach Torah. They may feel inept and embarrassed if someone suggests that they contribute to spreading Torah. They may assume that communal Rabbis and professional teachers are responsible for these matters. However, this line of reasoning is not correct. Just as every cent that Reuven contributed would benefit the beggar regardless of how much more his neighbour could donate, so too every moment of time and effort that we can dedicate to teaching Torah is extremely beneficial. Even if our contribution is very modest, we have no idea what difference our efforts can make, for others and also for ourselves.³

According to the halacha, even the destitute who rely on tzedakah must themselves fulfil the mitzvah of giving tzedakah.⁴ Similarly, even those who are not very learned and rely on others to teach them Torah can still help to teach others. As soon as we have learnt any Torah, we are immediately in the position of being able to pass on that teaching to someone else who has not yet learnt it. Hashem expects us to receive His Torah and to then pass it on to others. If we make an effort, we will be able to find plenty of opportunities to teach Torah – to our children, to our friends, to our work colleagues. The fact that we are not official Torah scholars per se is irrelevant. Just like Reuven, we are each responsible for making our own contribution to the Jewish people's Torah knowledge to the best of our abilities. And we are responsible for the spiritual welfare of our fellow Jews just as much as for their financial and physical welfare. In caring about the spiritual welfare of others, we are enhancing our own spiritual welfare and we are giving them a gift that will last forever!

Let's try something this week:

1. Look for opportunities to help teach Torah to those around us. It can be as simple as sitting down with someone and offering to read through a passage together or sharing a Torah thought that you heard or read.
2. Remember, giving someone the gift of Torah is a gift that lasts forever.
3. Remember that often the 'giver' receives just as much as the 'receiver', or more, both in this world and the next.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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³ We need to take care to avoid preaching and to only teach those who are receptive. Being too forceful when the recipient is not interested can actually be counter-productive. Common sense, intuition and sensitivity are required.

⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 248:1. If a person is destitute, they do not need to give 10% but they should still give a small amount. An orthodox Rabbi should be consulted for the parameters.