

“Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him; and you shall grant him enough for his lack which is lacking for him.” (15:8)

When a poor man comes to the door requesting assistance, he certainly needs a comforting word, some sound advice, even a nice Torah thought. We often forget, however, that he is there for one purpose: to raise sorely needed funds for himself and his family. His time is limited, and his needs are great. The Dubno Maggid once went on a fundraising mission. He came to the home of a distinguished scholar who was also quite wealthy. The wealthy man was honored to have someone of the Maggid's stature visit him, and he reciprocated this honor. Prior to asking for a contribution, the Maggid began with a scholarly discourse on the laws of tzedakah, charity. The man was reasonably impressed, adding his own erudite exegesis. This went on for awhile. Every time the Maggid gave a Torah thought, the man reciprocated. The Maggid noted that while they were having a lively scholarly discussion, the purpose of his visit had not been fulfilled. He still had no money.

The Maggid looked at his wealthy host and said, “Let me share a story with you. In one of the far-off countries, there is a community where the people had never seen an onion. One day a traveler came to this community and brought with him an onion. The people were very excited with this wonderful find and thanked him profusely. They showered him with gifts and money when he left to continue his travels. They took the onion and planted it. Soon, they were able to harvest many onions. Word spread that this community had handsomely rewarded the wanderer that had introduced them to onions.

“Soon, afterwards, another traveler looking to secure some sorely needed funds arrived in this community with poppy seeds. The people were overjoyed with this new gift. They realized that they must offer remuneration for the poppy seeds. What would be the most worthy gift to give the traveler? Nothing less than their most valued commodity: onions! They decided to pay their new supplier with onions. We can only imagine what he told them, ‘I did not come here for onions; I came for money.’

“Likewise, my dear host, while I greatly appreciate the brilliant Torah thoughts that you have shared with me, I have come here, however, for something else: money. Does not the Torah say that one must give the poor man ‘that which is lacking for him’? I lack money.”