

“Look down from Your holy abode, from the Heavens, and bless Your people, Yisrael.” (26:15)

The word *hashkifah*, look down, usually has a negative connotation, which implies a harsh scrutinizing focus on a subject. The sole exception to this rule is the *hashkifah* of *Viddui Maaser*, which is the confessional prayer that one recites upon successfully dispensing the required tithes. In this case, we ask Hashem to look down and bless us. The *Midrash* explains that this is the power of *tzedakah*. It can transform the *Middas HaDin*, attribute of strict Justice, into the *Middas HaRachamim*, attribute of Mercy. Although *hashkifah* generally implies something bad, when people act in accordance with Hashem's will, dispensing their tithes to the *Levi* and the poor, it is transformed into a positive word.

The *Kesav Sofer* cites his father, the *Chasam Sofer* who questions this. Why should the Torah use a word that has a negative connotation only to “change” its implication into a positive meaning? Why not simply use a word that originally has a positive overtone?

The *Kesav Sofer* explains that prosperity and material blessing can, in fact, have a negative effect on a person's life. First, the more material reward a person receives in this world, the less he is likely to receive in the World to Come. Furthermore, wealth can impede one's relationship with Hashem and diminish his fear of Him. Throughout the Torah we find *pesukim* alluding to the negative reaction one may have to wealth and material abundance. Since the goal of a Jew is to raise his spiritual level and to serve Hashem faithfully, so that he can achieve eternal reward in the World to Come, it makes sense that too much materialism is a severe deterrent to attaining this goal.

Yet, when one makes good use of his material resources by sharing it with those less fortunate, and supporting Torah institutions, this wealth becomes a source of blessing and spiritual merit. This is the Torah's lesson. Just as *hashkifah* can be transformed into a positive connotation, so, too, can material abundance be used for our spiritual benefit. It is not the resources that are inherently bad; how we use them defines their value.