

"If among you there will be a poor man of one of you brethren ... you shall not harden your heart ... but rather open wide your hand to him. Also lend and lend him, sufficient for his need which he lacks." (15:7-8)

According to the Torah, the duty to provide for the poor rests equally upon the community as a whole and upon every individual member thereof. This obligation is an essential principle of the law of *tzedaka* (charity). The community at large and each individual member must cooperate in order to realize the goal set by the *Torah*. Those who seek to fulfill the *mitzvah* by contributing only to communal funds do not embody the spirit of Jewish "giving" which is encouraged by the *Torah*.

Based upon the *Torah's* admonishment of "*do not harden your heart*," one may assume that Jewish hearts are naturally predisposed to benevolence. This inborn inclination can only be defeated by selfish considerations. The poor man is always referred to as "your brother," regardless of his relationship to you, he is your brother, a child of your Father in Heaven.

From the double language of the *pesukim*, i.e. *ubyhcg, ycgvw j,p, j,pw* we derive that all of the imperatives to be benevolent are emphasized. The obligation is constant, regardless of the number of times one has previously given aid. The *posuk* culminates with the words "*sufficient for his need*." These words express the uniqueness of the Jewish duty to give *tzedaka*. We must attend to the individual needs of the poor man. We must supply whatever he "lacks" with consideration to his particular situation. He may have requirements which are indispensable to him due to habits established under better circumstances. These, too, must be furnished, so that we fulfill "*that which he lacks*."

Two unique factors characterize the Jewish sense of generosity. First, one who does not help the poor to his utmost ability commits a grave sin. Charity is not an impulsive act subject to the emotions of sympathy and compassion. Rather, *tzedaka* is assigned to the realm of the strictest dictates of duty. This categorization diminishes the recipient's feelings of degradation. The Jewish poor do not receive "alms" or gifts of pity; they receive their due share. A second important insight is the establishment of the fixed amount of one tenth to fulfill the obligation to give *tzedaka*. Reflecting this notion, it is as if every Jew is the administrator of his own fund. Keeping this metaphorical structure in mind, he should dedicate his fund, no matter what size, to Hashem for charitable and sacred purposes. Since it no longer belongs to him, he will be delighted to dispose of this fund to fulfill holy purposes for which it has been entrusted to him.