

“And you shall eat it before Hashem, your G-d... the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil... so that you will learn to fear Hashem...” (14:23)

Daas Zekeinim emphasize the “your” part of the grain, wine and oil. They explain that the pasuk conveys a profound message: If you give Maaser, if you tithe your grain, oil, and wine, then it is yours. In other words, Hashem grants us these possessions because we listen to His command and either share it with the Levi or the poor man, or we eat it in Yerushalayim. Giving Maaser does more than fulfill a mitzvah, it creates our ownership, it grants us license to claim these possessions as our own. Whatever Hashem created is for a purpose – to serve Him. To that end, when we realize the purpose of our material possessions, that they exist for us to serve Hashem with them, then they become ours. What we own is in our possession as a deposit from the Almighty. Indeed, whatever gifts we receive from Hashem, all our material abundance, is all a gesture of Hashem’s beneficence, so that we may carry out His will.

Nachlas Tzvi cites a number of “tzedakah stories,” episodes in the lives of great people, in which their devotion to share their own material possessions with others less fortunate than they, earned them remarkable reward from the Almighty. Horav Moshe Ravkash, z.l., the author of the Be’er HaGolah would weep when he would see his wife’s candlesticks. A very poignant story informs us of the reason for this expression of emotion. It was during the fury of the Cossacks that the Jews of Vilna were bracing themselves for the vicious onslaught of these sub-humans. Whoever could gather his few possessions loaded them on a wagon and ran. The majority of the community, regrettably, did not believe that the danger was imminent, so they did not escape.

A few of the great Torah scholars of that generation did, in fact, escape to freedom. Among them were the Shach, the Shaar Efraim and the Beer HaGolah. Rav Moshe Ravkash, being an extremely wealthy man, tarried as long as he could, to enable himself to bury his money and gold and silver utensils. Luckily, he succeeded in hiding his material possessions and his wife’s jewelry. A displaced person, Rav Ravkash trekked from community to community in search of a place where he could go on with his life. His wandering led him to Amsterdam. At that time, the city of Amsterdam had a thriving Sephardic Jewish community. These Jews of Middle-Eastern descent embraced the Ashkenazi gaon, scholar, with open arms. This wealthy community saw to it that he was financially remunerated in accordance with his distinguished scholarship. He remained there until the Cossacks were driven back, and it was safe to return home.

Upon his return, he located his hidden treasures, but he was unable to make personal use of them, since the community was in dire need. The Jews who had survived, and those who had returned, were virtually penniless. Rav Moshe disbursed all of his money and even sold his wife’s jewelry to sustain the Jewish community. His wife, observing that he was selling all of their material possessions, even her jewelry, hid her silver candlesticks out of concern for their own financial predicament, so that her “giving” husband would not also give these away. After awhile, when the

financial situation seemed to improve, she divulged to her husband that she had hidden their candlesticks. When Rav Moshe saw the candlesticks, understanding that his wife had concealed them so that they would have some funds with which to sustain themselves, he sighed heavily. He exclaimed, "How many poor people could have been supported by these candlesticks!" This is why he cried. Indeed, it is tears such as those that Hashem gathers and saves.

One never loses when he gives charity. "Aseir T'aseir" "you shall tithe." Chazal add, "Aseir bishvil shetisasheir", "Tithe so that you shall become wealthy." This is more than a reward or a blessing. It is, rather, a consequence of one's giving. In an anecdotal remark to a community that was not sufficiently giving, the Maggid m'Kelm once said, "Hashem assures us that "Ki lo yechdal evyon mikerev haaretz", "For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land" (Devarim 15:11). In other words, there will always be poor people. If we do not see to the needs of the poor, they will unfortunately not survive. Someone will have to replace them. It quite possibly might be you.

Indeed, we never know the far-reaching effect of that act of charity, as evidenced by the following story that occurred with the Rama, z.l., the rav of Crakow: There was a simple but interesting man in the community who went by a number of pseudonyms. He was called Moshe Trager/carrier, because he would carry packages for people. He was commonly called, Moshe Shikur, the drunk, or Moshe Shabbosnick, because he would save up the small amounts of money he would earn during the week, go to the liquor store on erev Shabbos, and purchase a cup of mead wine. He would proceed to drink this wine with great relish. While he drank this wine, he would joyfully sing "Shabbos, Shabbos, Shabbos." He would then go to the mikveh and prepare for Shabbos.

One week, on his way to perform his ritual, he overheard a poor woman saying, "Moshe is going to buy wine for himself, and I do not even have money to purchase two candles for Shabbos." Moshe was in a quandary. Should he give the woman the money, or should he get his glass of wine? He decided not to listen to his yetzer hara, evil inclination, and he gave the woman money to buy candles.

Regrettably, this was to be Moshe's last trip to the mikveh, as he passed away shortly thereafter. Since it was almost Shabbos, the chevra kaddisha, burial society, decided to delay his burial until after Shabbos. That night, Moshe appeared before the Ramah and said, "There is a critique against you in Heaven." "Moshe, you are a shikur; go home," the Ramah answered. It was then that Moshe revealed to the Ramah that he had died. The Ramah did not believe him until he went to shul and discovered that, indeed, Moshe had died right before Shabbos and that his body lay in the chevra kaddisha's room, awaiting burial. Realizing now that Moshe's appearance was a special occurrence, the Ramah immediately went to the room and questioned Moshe regarding his message from Heaven. "In Heaven they are upset that you do not avail the poor people the opportunity to also give charity. Since they have limited funds, people do not ask them for anything," answered Moshe. "What should I do?" asked the Ramah. "From now on, whenever the community is in need of funds, the collectors should also go to the poor and ask them to

participate,” was Moshe’s answer.

The Ramah continued, asking Moshe what warranted his selection to deliver this message from Heaven, even before his body had been buried. Moshe then related how he had overcome his evil-inclination and gave his “drinking” money to a woman, so that she could purchase candles for Shabbos. “That woman was none other than Esther HaMalkah. As a result of her exemplary deeds, her neshamah had consistently entered higher and higher levels of paradise, until she arrived at a very sublime level where she was not granted entry. She was told that this level is only for the poor who, despite their poverty, give charity and perform kindness for others. She then asked, ‘Is it my fault that I was wealthy? I am certain that had I been poor, I would have been as charitable and as kind as when I was rich’.” The Heavenly Tribunal decided to allow her neshamah to return to this world as a poor woman, so that she could have the opportunity to give tzedakah, even in this difficult circumstance. When the Ramah heard this story, he accepted upon himself to see to it that all people, regardless of their financial situation, would be given the opportunity to join in the mitzvah of tzedakah. Indeed, the Nachlas Tzvi cites the Chafetz Chaim who once said, “There is a wealthy Jew in Lublin who has the wherewithal to sustain all the yeshivos in Europe. What about the mitzvah of tzedakah imposed on all the other Jews? Why should they be deprived of this mitzvah? This is why Heaven has arranged it that this wealthy Jew does not give, so that others will be able to give.”