

## If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

*Tzedakah*, which is generally translated as charity, means much more than exhibiting one's generosity towards his fellowman. It is not simply the means for imparting a favor; it is justice, derived from the word *tzedeq*. In other words, "I" have, so, therefore, "you" must also have. The world was created with *tzedeq*, justice, so that all are equal. The fact that some have more than others behooves them to share with others. After all, it is only right. The value which the benefactor accrues far exceeds his contribution, so great is the reward for giving the *tzedakah*.

*Tzedakah* does not require *kavanah*, intention, for the *mitzvah*. Other *mitzvos* do require *kavanah*. *Tzedakah* is a *mitzvah* that focuses on the needs of the needy. As long as these needs are addressed, the benefactor has earned his reward. On the other hand, there is no question that the reward is magnified with the proper intention. The finer the *kavanah*, the greater the *mitzvah*. Protecting the beneficiary from embarrassment and preserving his self-esteem are factors in the efficacy of this *mitzvah*.

Sacrifice plays a critical role in the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. While the primary objective is to support the beneficiary, how much the benefactor sacrifices to do so impacts his reward. Sacrifice is relative. Since personal value systems differs from person to person, sacrifice will be relative. For some, it means foregoing physical pleasure; for others, sacrifice is defined by spiritual renouncement. Helping someone during the time devoted to Torah study is for some people a supreme sacrifice. It all depends on how devoted one is to Torah and *mitzvah* observance.

One famous story which imparts a number of lessons concerns **Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Neshchiz**. Rav Mordechai was a poor man who set aside every penny he had so that he could purchase a fine *Lulav* and *Esrog*, as the Four Species were rare and, thus, quite expensive. As he was going to purchase the *Esrog*, he encountered a man who was weeping bitterly. His inquiry revealed that this man made his meager living from hauling things with his wagon. His horse and wagon were his only means of earning a living. His horse had just died. He no longer had a way to earn a living. This was reason enough for him to cry. He was not mourning his horse. He just needed a horse.

The *Rebbe* asked him how much a new horse would cost. The wagon driver replied with an amount perfectly coinciding with the amount of money the *Rebbe* had saved for his *Esrog*. The *Rebbe* immediately took out his money purse and gave the man his money. "Here, go buy yourself a new horse, with my blessings," the *Rebbe* said. The man rushed off, overjoyed that he could now continue his livelihood.

As for the *Rebbe*, he turned his eyes Heavenward and said, "*Ribono Shel Olam*; Dear G-d, all other Jews will fulfill the *mitzvah* of the Four species with an *Esrog* and *Lulav*. I will do so with a

horse!”

A number of *tzedakah* lessons can be derived from here. I would rather focus on another lesson – one that concerns *mitzvah* performance. *Mitzvos* are defined by the attitude manifest by the one who performs the *mitzvah*. We think that in order to fulfill a *mitzvah* it is necessary to have all of the *hiddurim*, beautifications and stringencies. While one should go to all lengths to carry out a *mitzvah*, this idea has limits. For example, having a beautiful *Esrog* which costs hundreds of dollars, yet not understanding the essence of the *mitzvah*; spending oodles of money on oneself while ignoring the plight of the fellow next door; spending thousands to celebrate the *Sedarim* in some unchartered island escape, yet remaining mute when the *shul* makes an appeal for *Maos Chittim*; feeling that the only place to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Lulav* and *Esrog* is at the *Kosef*; and the list goes on.

If one’s attitude is correct, the *mitzvah* of *Esrog* can be fulfilled with a horse. If one’s attitude is all about himself with very little place for Hashem, “where”, “what” and “how much” will not make a difference.