

Every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul. (30:12)

The *Baal HaTurim* observes that the word, *v'nasnu*: *vov, nun, saf, nun, vov*, is a palindrome (in this instance, a word which reads the same backward as forward). This prompts him to posit that one who gives to *tzedakah*, charity, does not lose his contribution; rather, he receives it back. Hashem sees to it that one's good deeds are not forgotten. What he gives to others will eventually be returned to him.

Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, notes another palindrome in the Torah: *V'hikeihu*, "And he will strike him" (*Bereishis* 32:9), which refers to Eisav's striking one of Yaakov Avinu's camps. *Vov, hay, kuf, hay, vov*. He explains that one who strikes us will receive just punishment from Hashem, measure for measure. This concept has been a source of hope and solace to our people amid the travail that has accompanied us throughout our exile. If I may add that the *mitzvah* of giving *shekalim*, requiring every Jew to give a half-*shekel*, makes him realize that, even when he gives a "whole" donation, he is but a "half." Only when unity reigns among Jews does one become whole; consequently, one who "gives" will be protected from Eisav striking out against him.

The word *v'nasnu*, they shall give, applies to a unique form of gift. The word *matanah*, gift, applies to a bestowal on our fellow under such circumstances that the benefactor receives nothing in return and needs nothing from the beneficiary. It is pure giving for the sake of giving assistance, a tribute, an act of philanthropy. The benefactor sees someone who is in need, and, out of the goodness of his heart, he is happy to oblige and offer his gift. Such a *v'nasnu*, through which the only one who benefits is the beneficiary, has the power to protect and withstand Eisav's *v'hikahu*.

When one is blessed by Hashem, he must realize that it is a gift for a purpose. Hashem does not provide His panacea to *v'hikahu* unless it is preceded by a whole-hearted *v'nasnu*. *Horav Yosef Shaul Nattenson, zl*, author of the *Shoeil U'Maieshiv*, was *Rav* of Lvov. He once went with his brother-in-law, *Horav Mordechai Zev*, to solicit funds for *pidyon shevuyim*, to pay ransom, secure the release of a fellow Jew taken captive by slave traders or robbers or imprisoned unjustly. Sadly, this was not an uncommon occurrence. The wicked gentiles who preyed on Jews were acutely aware that Jews are benevolent and would pay for their brother's release, and they took advantage of it. They stopped at the home of *Rav* Hershel Bernstein, a prodigious philanthropist, who happily supported many causes. The well-known benefactor was ecstatic to see them, and he insisted that they have lunch with him. As a caveat, he would donate all of the necessary ransom. He loved guests, especially such distinguished personages, and he felt it was neither appropriate nor dignified that two such illustrious *rabbanim* spend their day knocking on doors seeking contributions.

A meal with two such Torah giants revolves around Torah. In this case, they focused on the significance of the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shevuyim*. When *Rav* Hershel heard the topic, he said, "I

cannot add *divrei Torah* to such profound thoughts with which their honors are enhancing this meal, but I can share an exceptional, inspiring story – indeed the story which was the harbinger of my wealth. When I was a young man, I studied Torah and was supported by my father-in-law. When the time came for me to go out on my own, I traveled to Leshkowitz, to the great market, to invest, buy and sell, in order to support my growing family. I had four hundred gold coins in my possession. My goal was to purchase precious stones and resell them at a profit.

“I arrived at the market to see thousands of sellers, brokers and buyers, all engrossed in the business of making money. As I stood by the gateway to the market, I chanced upon a woman who was weeping bitterly. “How can I help you?” I asked. “What is wrong?” She replied that her daughter had been promised in marriage to a young man. She had promised a dowry of four hundred gold coins which she did not have. She feared that the marriage would be called off, and her daughter would be shamed. She was a young widow with no visible means of support. My heart went out to her, so I gave her the money that I had brought along to invest. This was the sum total of my material assets.

“For the sake of curiosity, I walked around the market. Who knows what I would venture to find? As I was walking, a man approached, and, in his hand, he had the most beautiful coral beads. I knew jewelry, and I was partial to precious stones, but I had never come across such beauty. ‘Would you like to purchase these beads?’ he asked. ‘I have no money to invest,’ I replied. ‘You look like a trustworthy person. I will give it to you on credit. When you sell it, you will remember me.’ Interestingly, the price he asked was four hundred gold pieces. I sold it immediately at three times its price and made a handsome profit. I returned to the man and paid him off. He was so impressed that he showed me more jewelry which cost me one thousand gold pieces. What did I have to lose? I had the money. I bought and sold, making a large profit. The next day, when I paid him his thousand gold pieces, he sold me jewelry for six thousand gold pieces. Once again, I made an incredible profit. When I returned the next morning to reimburse the man for his jewelry, he was nowhere to be found. No one had any idea who he was or where he had gone. I have never been able to locate him. I am certain, however, that Hashem had rewarded me for the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas kallah*, helping a young bride to get married. I saved this girl the shame of a broken match. Hashem repaid me multiple times over.”