

Give So That You Will Become Wealthy

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Aser Taaser. Our Torah portion contains the commandment of tithing our produce.

“You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all the yield of your sowing that is brought from the field” (Devarim, 14:22).

In the Talmud, R. Yochanan comments on this verse:

“A tithe shall you tithe [*te'aser*]” (Deuteronomy 14:22)? This phrase can be interpreted homiletically: Take a tithe [*asser*] so that you will become wealthy [*titasher*], in the merit of the mitzva” (Taanit, 9a).

There is a story about this teaching that appears in *Pardes Yosef* (a collection of the writings of Rav Moshe Yosef Rubin, published by his grandson, Moshe Yosef Rubin, page 50).

One time a poor Jew came to the Maggid of Mezritch and complained that he was not making an adequate living.

The Maggid said to him: “My advice to you is to give ten percent to charity, as it states... ‘Take a tithe [asser] so that you will become wealthy [titasher].’

The poor Jew said: “But I don’t have anything from which to give charity. The Maggid responded: “Even if you just make a few pennies, you should give the charity from those pennies.”

Indeed, the man did that. And sure enough, he became a very wealthy man. He hired an accountant who made sure to calculate all his earnings and to give exactly ten percent to charity.

After a while there was a Gentile in the town whose business started to do very well and at the same time this Jewish man’s business took a downward turn. He again went to the Maggid and asked for advice. The Maggid asked him: “When you do business with this Gentile are you completely honest with all your weights and measures?” The Jew admitted that he was not completely honest in this area. Said the Maggid: “This is the reason why your business is doing poorly. You are giving charity from the money that you made dishonestly by stealing from the Gentile. In the heavenly court this is considered to be the charity of the Gentile and not your charity. For this reason, he gets the reward of the charity. This is why the verse states that you should give charity from ‘your crops,’ and not from the crops you steal wrongfully from others.”

There are two problems that I personally struggle with as it relates to this story and this Talmudic teaching that the more we tithe the wealthier we will become.

First, our experience shows that this story is not always true. There are plenty of people who give charity and do not seem to get rich as a result. It is difficult to imagine that we are supposed to take this story of the Maggid of Mezritch literally.

And secondly, the goal of leading a proper spiritual life should not be to become wealthy. We shouldn't give charity in order to become rich but rather, in order to help people and causes we believe in. Why then are the rabbis emphasizing material wealth as a reward for giving charity? It seems kind of empty and almost missing the entire point of charity, which is to recognize that we are the caretakers on earth of Hashem's resources.

There is a colloquial rabbinic expression which reformulates the Talmudic statement and puts it in a different light. This reformulation helps us realize that the Talmud's statement that we will get wealthy if we give charity is meant to be understood spiritually, not literally. The expression goes: "*aser taaser vetimtzah mazalkha*, take a tithe *and in that merit you will find your destiny.*"

This expression should be read as a commentary on the earlier Talmudic statement. We shouldn't think of our reward for charity as a promise of more money in our wallets, but as something much deeper and richer. When the Talmud tells us that one who gives charity will become rich, it doesn't mean "cash rich," but rather it means, "spiritually rich." It means that the more we give to charity the richer our lives will be and the more we will appreciate the blessings of our own life.

Rav Shimon Shkop offers a spiritual explanation for why it is that Hashem rewards one who gives charity with more blessings. "One of our main functions in this world is to help others. This is included in our obligation to emulate Gd who constantly aids mankind. Just as a person who is appointed to be in charge of dispensing a certain amount of money and properly carries out his duties will be entrusted with larger amounts of money in the future, so too does Gd deal with man. If a person takes tithes from his income, that is, he distributes part of his wealth to the poor and to other worthy causes, he shows that he is a reliable treasurer and Gd will entrust him with greater wealth" (Love Your Neighbor, 387). Rav Shkop goes on to argue that tithing is not limited to the area of giving money, but is primarily about giving ourselves to others spiritually. The more we give and inspire others, the richer our own lives will be.

This week a friend of mine sent me a picture from Zambia. He has been supporting some students from Zambia to go to college and get advanced degrees. In turn, these students have been supporting other students and orphans from their village. This is true wealth. It is the satisfaction of seeing the world become a better place because of an initial investment of charitable funds.

While "cash wealth," is necessary to live in the real world, nothing at all can compete with the enormous benefit of spiritual wealth.

For me personally, the greatest spiritual wealth is helping others to live a meaningful purposeful life built around Torah study.

We all have our own destiny in the area of spiritual wealth. For many of us, since we are deeply committed Jews, we can be invested in teaching (formally and informally) Torah to others—to family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

There is a story told about Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, who lived in the 18th century and was the antecedent of the great rabbinic dynasty -- the Soloveitchik family. He was a very wealthy man who gave enormous amounts of money to charity. However, he had a string of business mishaps and he eventually ended up losing all of his money and becoming destitute. No one could understand how such a pious Jew and generous giver of charity could lose his money. The members of the community went to Rav Chaim Volozhiner to try and understand how this could have happened to Reb Moshe Soloveitchik.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner gathered three distinguished rabbis convened a Beit Din and instructed them to investigate the matter. This Beit Din of rabbis returned to R. Chaim Volozhiner and said, “We have investigated the matter and we have not found any apparent sin. The only thing we can imagine is that R. Moshe Soloveitchik must have sinned by giving too much money to charity, as one is not supposed to give more than one-fifth of his money to charity.”

This answer was rejected by R. Chaim Volozhiner, who said that it is not plausible to assume that that was the reason for the financial loss.

Meanwhile, while the whole city of Kovno was wondering why Rav Moshe Soloveitchik had lost all his money, he himself knew that he needed to spend his time in a productive manner. He now had no business to deal with, but he did have more time on his hands. With his extra time he devoted himself to studying Torah and to teaching his children Torah. It soon became clear that Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik’s destiny was to be a scholar and not a businessman. When R. Chaim Volozhiner heard this, he said, “Now I understand why R. Moshe lost his business.” R. Moshe was destined to be a great Torah scholar and a rabbinic leader. If he had been immersed in the business world, he never would have reached his spiritual potential as a Torah scholar and he never would have become the forebear of one of the most illustrious rabbinic families in history (as told by R. Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Aleinu Leshabeach*, volume 5, 225).

Not everyone has the destiny to be a Torah scholar like R. Moshe Soloveitchik, but everyone does have a destiny to contribute to the world and bless the world with our contributions. It is our primary job in life to find our destiny.

In the daf yomi this week we encountered a powerful teaching that reinforces this lesson. There is a law that as it relates to a lulav, everyone must own their own lulav in order to fulfill the mitzvah. On the other hand, there is no commandment to own a Sukkah. One can fulfill the obligation of dwelling in a sukkah by borrowing a friend’s sukkah. The Talmud states:

Although the rabbis say that a person does not fulfill his obligation on the first day of the Festival with the lulav of another, he fulfills his obligation with the sukkah of another, as it is written: "All the homeborn in Israel shall reside in sukkot" (Leviticus 23:42). This teaches that all of the Jewish people are fit to reside in one sukka (Sukkah, 27b).

Kol yisrael reuyim leishev be-agudah achas. All of Israel is fit to dwell in one sukkah.

The Talmud is citing as a proof-text a verse which teaches that on a technical level the entirety of the Jewish people only need one Sukkah. How is that possible? Rashi explains: "If the value of one sukkah were divided among all the Jewish people, no individual would have a *peruta* stake in it; therefore, no individual could be considered even a part-owner of the sukkah. The only way the entire Jewish people could fulfill the mitzva in one sukkah is by residing in a communal sukkah that does not belong to any of them. Apparently, there is no obligation to reside specifically in one's own sukkah."

Since all of Israel is fit to live in one sukkah (as the verse states), therefore it is impossible for everyone to have an ownership share. Q.E.D. we must assume that one is not required to own a sukkah, and that a borrowed sukkah is sufficient.

The imagery of the Talmud on this otherwise esoteric point is messianic. When all of us are contributing in a meaningful way to the world and enriching the world then all of Israel can dwell together under one Sukkah. That dwelling cannot be monetized. None of us will have a penny's worth of ownership, and yet, we will all be owners of a shared value system. We will all dwell together under the canopy of Hashem.

You can now watch a Youtube recording of Rabbi Herzfeld's D'var Torah:
<https://youtu.be/39xDjrJ1Me4>