

Parsha Ponders

Re'eh | Aug 29, 2024 | 25 Av 5784

Small gifts, large benefits¹

נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך יקוק אלקיך בכל-מעשך ובכל משלח ידך
Give and give to him, and it should not be bad in your heart to give to him, for due to this matter
Hashem your G-d blesses you, in all of your deeds and in anything your hand accesses²

In discussing the *mitzvah* of *tzedaka*, the Torah uses a repeated phrase of נתון תתן, often translated as you shall surely give. Literally, it means give you shall give. This repeated expression teaches us that we are to give *tzedaka* to a poor person even a hundred times³.

Our Sages teach us⁴ a vague idea that when Yaakov declared that קטונתי מכל החסדים, I have become small due to all the loving kindness I've received⁵, the word for "I have become small" is meant to convey "a little bit", and "a little bit" is only a reference to *tzedaka*. How are we to understand this?

The intent is to teach us the proper attitude when giving *tzedaka*. When we give to someone poor, no matter how large the amount is, we should consider it to only be "a little bit". This produces three positive outcomes: (1) We won't be begrudging in what we gave, (2) we'll be more likely to give again and again⁶, (3) we won't lord over the poor person, becoming haughty in our generosity.

Accordingly, our Sages are telling us that "I have become small", meaning I'll only avoid becoming haughty in our generosity by thinking that it's "a little bit". At the same time, we aren't to think that the **money** given is small. Rather, "a little bit" is only a reference to *tzedaka*. The money received is great, but in terms of my obligation of *tzedaka*, I only gave a little bit.

The verse we started with now has a deeper meaning. Give and give to him. How is that possible? Only if it's not bad in our heart that we give to him. This is by thinking that it's only a little bit. Through this, we'll be able to keep giving, even a hundred times.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on *Tzedaka L'Chaim* § 453 by Rav Chaim Palagi

² Deuteronomy 15:10

³ Rashi ad. loc., quoting Sifrei Devarim § 117, which derives this from the double expression. Cf. Bava Metzia 31a which understands that the double expression השב תשיבם, return you shall return them, regarding lost objects, isn't teaching an unlimited number of times to perform the *mitzvah*. That is derived from the first word alone. The double expression is there to teach some other law. As such, Ibid 31b derives a different law from the double expression of נתון תתן, presumably because נתון alone would teach an unlimited requirement. See Nachalas Ya'akov ad. loc. Eimek HaNetziv ad. loc. (§ 63 in his edition) tries to resolve this by saying that the limitless obligation is learned from the word נתון, like in Bava Metzia, and Sifrei is simply teaching us a promise that if we give once, we'll come to give many times. If so, we would have to say this is how he learned Rashi as well. Although, this is not the simple reading of either source

Sifrei § 116 has the same derivation for verse 8 of פתוח תפתח, that one should open their hands to the poor even a hundred times. Interestingly, Rashi ad. loc. for some reason changes the wording to be כמה פעמים, "even many times". See Hagahos HaGra ad. loc. to Sifrei who amends the text there to say הרבה פעמים. This anomaly is noted by Rav Chaim Palagi in his U'Bacharta BaChaim ad. loc., and he cites his work Tzedaka L'Chaim, although it's unclear if his intent is our piece or a different one. I couldn't find where or if he tries to resolve this anomaly with Rashi. Perhaps his intent is with our piece, that even if you gave a hundred times, you should only consider it to be כמה פעמים

⁴ Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Zuta § 1, brought in Yalkut Shimoni Vayeira § 82 and Midrash HaGadol to Deuteronomy 15:10

⁵ Genesis 32:11

⁶ This would produce the Rambam's idea (found in his commentary to Avos 3:15) that repeated acts, no matter how small, can make an effect on a person. Giving many times *tzedaka* will transform someone into a giving person