

How to Get Rich- Guaranteed!

PARSHA INSIGHTS - R'AI (5757)

THE ARUCH HASHULCHAN ON TZEDAKA- Does it Really Make Us Wealthier?

The topic of *ma'aser* [giving a tenth of one's income for charity], and *tzedaka* [charity or tithe] in general, is discussed at great length in the written and oral Torah. "You must surely tithe **all** the produce of your seed..." (*Perek Yud Dalid, Pasuk Chof Bais* [chapter 14, verse 22 of Deuteronomy]). The *pasuk* is speaking about *ma'aser tevuah* [giving the proper tithes from agricultural produce]. How do we know that giving a tenth of one's monetary income is also included? *Tosfos* (beginning with the words "*asair t'asair*") on the *Gemara Taanis 9A* quotes and explains the *Sifri*, that all types of monetary profit are intended by our *pasuk* in *R'ai*. The extra word "*kol*" ["**all**"] in the *pasuk* hints to this conclusion of the oral Torah, that another type of *ma'aser* is present here as well.

It is not the object of this *d'var* [words of] Torah to go through the *halachos* [laws] of *tzedaka* and *ma'aser*. They are quite extensive, and some areas are subject to differing opinions, as in other topics of *halacha* [law]. Our goal is to discover the Torah's general ATTITUDE toward giving *tzedaka*. After looking into the *Gemara Taanis 9A*, we will conclude with the words of a premier *gaon* [genius] and *posek* [authority on Jewish law] for *Klal Yisroel* [the Jewish people], the *Aruch Hashulchan*.

As a preface, I have heard in the name of at least one *gadol* [great Torah sage] that if every affluent (and not affluent) Torah observant individual in this country gave *ma'aser*, an actual tenth of his or her income to *tzedaka*, no *yeshivos* [religious schools] or other Jewish institutions would be in debt. It certainly makes us think when we hear such a statement, and it inspires us to do our best.

Our above-mentioned *pasuk* says "*asair t'asair*" [you must surely separate a tenth for charity]. The *Gemara's drasha* [explanation] is extremely famous in explaining the double term used for giving *ma'aser*. It states in *Taanis 9A*, "*asair bishvil shetisasher*" [give *ma'aser* in order that you become wealthy]. The *Gemara* then establishes that although we are warned (*Devarim* [Deuteronomy] 6:16) NOT to test Hashem, the Torah never prohibited this regarding *tzedaka*. In other words, a person IS allowed to give *ma'aser* with the intention of becoming wealthy as a result! One must admit that this takes much *bitachon* [trust in Hashem], because initially, the person's money will be reduced by giving away a tenth of it. But he IS allowed to expect bountiful returns for his charitable gestures.

How does the *Gemara* prove that with *tzedaka*, we are allowed to test G-d? It states in the *navi* [prophet] *Malachi 3:10*, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, so *that* there may be food in My house, **and put Me to the test with that**, says Hashem, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you immeasurable blessing". The last words of the *pasuk* hint, according to the *Gemara*, that our lips will "wear out" - become exhausted - from saying "enough!" The *Maharsha* comments that this is a genuine test of trust; that is why Hashem urges us to test Him in this case. How could one expect that the result of reducing his amount of money will be MORE money for himself? Therefore G-d is telling us not to be puzzled by this, and to feel free to try it out with our money. THE RESULTS ARE GUARANTEED.

But are they? Did you ever hear of a wealthy person who conscientiously gave *ma'aser* but still lost his wealth? Of course there are people like that! So how do we explain this? Please be patient; the *Aruch Hashulchan* will take care of our problem shortly. First, a little background about the *Aruch Hashulchan*. His name is Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, and he lived from 1829 to 1908. Suffice it to say that his monumental work on all four divisions of *Shulchan Aruch* is acclaimed worldwide. He is often the bottom line in *halacha*, especially on the three *chalakim* [parts] of *Shulchan Aruch* that have no *Mishna Brura* written on them. Numerous times I heard from the mouth of my *rosh* [head of the] *yeshiva*, Rabbi Berel Wein, that in Europe, "they would follow the *Aruch Hashulchan* up a tree" against other opinions, even more stringent ones. I have heard this from other *halachic* [legal] authorities as well. Rabbi Wein often favors his *psak* [decision], and when the *Mishna Brura* argues with the *Aruch Hashulchan*, my *rosh yeshiva's derech* [path/way] is that one is certainly permitted to practice like the *Aruch Hashulchan*, **depending on the situation** and all circumstances. Of course, a competent *posek* should always be consulted in areas of doubt.

Back to our topic. In *Yoreh Daiah* 247:6, the *Aruch Hashulchan* states as follows. (Some comments are from the *Tur* and others, and some are his own.) The matter is already checked and tested. Not only will a person NOT LACK money because of the *tzedaka* he gives, but the opposite will happen. Wealth and honor will be increased for him. He then quotes the *Gemara Taanis* we reviewed above, that the windows of heaven will be opened up for the benefactor.

Afterward, Rav Epstein cites the opinion of some, that this promise of increased affluence only refers to the *tzedaka* called *MA'ASER* - the actual *TENTH* given from one's income; there is no such promise regarding other amounts or types of charity that one gives.

After quoting this idea, the *Aruch Hashulchan* himself rejects it by stating that there is no sound reason to make such a distinction. ANY charity brings a promise of more money to the *ba'al tzedaka* [giver of *tzedaka*]. There is also an opinion that the whole guarantee of increased wealth is only a reward for *ma'aser* given from produce, not from money. Furthermore, some claim that the only way *ma'aser* leads to more wealth is if it is given with the clear intention that such should be the result. But the *Aruch Hashulchan* states his opinion: There is no reason to make such contrasts. Whether actual *ma'aser* or other *tzedaka*, produce or money, intention or no intention - ALL *tzedaka* leads to affluence for the giver; this is what the *Gemara* means.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* then makes some very emphatic remarks. Experience testifies that many well-to-do individuals who give more and more *tzedaka* become wealthier and wealthier. **And even though some very charitable, prosperous people do lose their wealth, this is one of the hidden things, which only Hashem can fathom (based on Devarim 29:28). The tzedaka they give definitely benefits them, and most generous givers do NOT become destitute anyway.** Most *ba'alei tzedaka* only become more and more affluent. In addition, *tzedaka* does the opposite of harm - it pushes away harsh decrees, and it saves us from starvation during famine.

In summary, giving *tzedaka* properly certainly brings more prosperity to us. We do not know fully how Hashem operates His universe, but if a *ba'al tzedaka* loses his money, IT WAS NOT THE CHARITY HE GAVE WHICH CAUSED HIM TO GO BROKE. Giving *tzedaka* can only help us; **it** is never a source of poverty. Quite to the contrary, it can annul evil decrees, bringing salvation and success. Our *pasuk* in *R'ai* hints to it - "*asair t'asair*" - give *tzedaka* and become wealthy.

May these holy words of the *Torah Shebiksav* [Written Torah] and *Torah Sheb'al Peh* [Oral Torah], *Rishonim* [early commentators] and *Achronim* [later commentators], inspire us to properly fulfill our obligations of giving *tzedaka*.

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