

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Re'eh

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

NEVER TOO LATE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..."
(11:26)

The Vilna Gaon explained that by using the word נותן ("I place" - in present tense), the Torah is teaching us that no matter where a person is in his life - even if he has already gone down the wrong path - the opportunity to choose to receive Hashem's blessings will always be available to him.

VESSEL FOR BLESSINGS

Rebbe Nachman

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..."
(11:26)

When G-d sends bounty, it descends as an undifferentiated light. It is up to the individual to form a vessel to receive that bounty. If one's vessel is whole, then he can receive G-d's blessing. But if his vessel is not whole, G-d forbid, then although the light of blessing comes to him, he has no means of receiving it.

Thus, the verse states: "See, I am placing before you." G-d sends His light from Above; it is up to you to perfect your vessel so you can receive it. (See Likutey Moharan I, 36:6)

MAKE THE MOST OF "TODAY"

Reb Chanoch Henoah of Alexander

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..."
(11:26)

The pasuk states: ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום - there are two different kinds of "hayom" - today; the hayom of blessing and the hayom of curse.

Consideration of the present moment as an impetus for action can be either positive or negative: אם לא עבשיו - "If not now, when?" spurs a Jew on to do good. On the other hand, "Eat and drink for tomorrow we die" leads one down the path of evil.

REVEALING BLESSINGS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..."
(11:26)

G-d provides all His creatures with whatever they need to accomplish their purpose in this world. This includes both physical gifts (such as good health, prosperity, and talent) and mental gifts (such as courage, optimism, and sensitivity). However, even if G-d has designated the proper gifts for us, obstacles (such as various types of misbehavior) can sometimes prevent these Divine gifts from materializing in our lives, preventing them from descending from the realm of the potential into the realm of the actual.

In such cases, we need a "blessing." A blessing does not create new Divine beneficence; it simply allows us to receive what G-d has already intended for us. Thus, when G-d tells us that He has set before us "a blessing and a curse," He means that through the choices we make, we can determine the extent to which the beneficence He has stored away for us will become manifest in our lives.

Furthermore, the more we dedicate ourselves to fulfilling our Divine mission, the more means G-d provides us with in order to fulfill our goals. Thus, besides accessing what G-d has set aside for us, we can increase the Divine beneficence available to us, as well. (Likutei Torah 4:19a)

A Divine curse is actually a blessing that is too great to be revealed within our limited world and must therefore be "disguised" as a curse. Our challenge is to see it in this perspective, rather than falling into the trap of becoming angry with G-d. Thus, pain and negativity exist in order to provide us with free choice. Free choice, in turn, exists in order to enable us to earn the rewards for our choices, so we need not feel unworthy of the blessings that G-d bestows upon us.

When we recognize that evil exists solely to provide us with the free choice to reject it, our struggle with it becomes much easier. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, p. 1339) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

A TIME FOR INTROSPECTION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..." (11:26)

With Parshas Re'eh, we enter a time of year which calls for introspection. We are meant to spend the upcoming month of Elul examining our actions, reassessing our goals, and implementing the various steps of teshuvah.

The Kotzker Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel Morgenstern zt'l, makes a fascinating point. He points out that the upcoming weekly parshios provide an insight into what we are meant to accomplish during these particular weeks. Thus, the week we bench Rosh Chodesh Elul is meant for us to: "Re'eh - look." Each Jew must stop and look inside himself for self-introspection to know where he needs to begin.

Once one sees what needs to be done, we can then set up: "Shoftim v'shotrim - judges and officers," to enforce these areas which require improvement. One must choose a strategy (i.e., not speaking lashon hara for two hours a day, or counting to ten before bursting out in anger) and forcefully implement it. This way, it can actually work.

At this point in Elul, one is now ready to do battle. "Ki Seitzei la'milchamah al oyvecha - go and wage war against your enemies," i.e., the yetzer hara and bad middos. You've "seen" the problems and have begun "enforcing" the remedial strategies. Now it's time to put these strategies into action. Remember, this is war and if you let up, the enemy will gain the upper hand.

But the goal is not just to fight. "Ki Savo - go forth" - also enter into spiritual pursuits. Grab every opportunity to do mitzvos and good deeds. Then, and only then, can the Day of Judgment arrive, and we can all be zoche to, "Atem Nitzavim hayom kulchem lifnei Hashem - You stand this day, all of you before Hashem," knowing that we've come prepared.

PIPELINES OF BLESSING

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..." (11:26)

Mashal: A king once dug a special wellspring of pure water on his castle grounds. He was a benevolent king and wished for all of his subjects to enjoy this wonderful water. He allowed the people to attach pipes to the well and draw the water directly into their own homes.

Those who were wise and respectful laid new, clean pipes to guard the purity of the water. They genuinely enjoyed the water and loved the king for giving them this gracious gift. The lazy foolish people, however, took old, rusty and leaky pipes. Naturally, the few drops that they received were foul smelling and repulsive. Their reaction was, "The king is giving us horrible water."

Nimshal: R' Chaim of Chernowitz zt'l (Be'er Mayim Chaim) points out: Hashem created this world with the purpose of infusing it with goodness and myriad blessings. He truly wishes to provide a world filled with beracha - blessing.

We, as His Chosen Nation, must decide if we want to be the conduit that will fill up this earthly existence with His bountiful kindness and infinite munificence.

The choice is ours: By fulfilling the mitzvos of the Torah and serving Hashem with total devotion, we allow the "pipeline" of blessing to flow directly into our lives. The king, Hashem, has a life-sustaining well of blessing. All He asks of His people is to connect a clean "pipe" - Torah, mitzvos and good deeds - to His well. Those who construct a clean, pure conduit without foreign thoughts and objectives, will drink of these waters and love Hashem for it.

CHOICE OF PERCEPTION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..." (11:26)

Moshe Rabbeinu addresses the entire Klal Yisrael as a whole during his final "37-day mussar shmuess (ethics lecture)" before his death. However, he begins the message of free choice with the word "re'eh - look" in singular form.

Chazal explain that Moshe is speaking to every individual to choose life by viewing life situations positively. If something can be viewed in more than one way, make sure to view it in the positive way.

We cannot choose our life experiences; we don't even know what will happen in five minutes from now! The only thing we can choose is how we will react to each specific situation, which of course depends on how we view it.

Rav Zelig Pliskin shlit'a explains that this concept is the key to happiness. Every single thing that happens to a person is a fact. Nothing is intrinsically great or terrible. It only depends on how we view it.

You are the one who decides if this fact is positive, negative or neutral. If you decide that something is terrible, such as having your car break down, and you react by telling yourself, "Now I'm stuck, and it will cost me a fortune to fix this," you will be miserable. But if your attitude is that everything is terrific, you will be happy. "Now I'll finally get some exercise!" you'll tell yourself. And only by being happy are you truly alive!

This is what Moshe tells his beloved nation: "Look and see the positive. Each one of you individually can choose life, not by choosing the circumstances in life, but by choosing how you will react to those circumstances."

Remember, a person's altitude in life depends on his attitude in life!

PERSONAL PERCEPTION

Kotzker Rebbe

"See, I place before you today, a blessing..." (11:26)

Why does the pasuk begin with the second person singular - Re'eh, "Behold you," and then shift to the plural - lifneichem, "before you"? This was done because "the portion that is set before you," the many, is the same for all. But when it comes to perceiving it, each of us sees it after our own fashion. What we behold depends on who we are.

IMPACTFUL ACTIONS

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..." (11:26)

Moshe opens this parsha by informing Bnei Yisrael that they had a choice to make - a choice between "blessing" and "curse." By committing themselves to observe the mitzvos, they will earn blessing, whereas choosing to abandon the mitzvos would bring just the opposite, Heaven forbid.

Many mefarshim noted the glaring grammatical anomaly in this pasuk, which transitions from the singular form to the plural form. Moshe first says ראה - "See," in the singular form, but then says, נותן לפניכם - "placing before you," in the plural form. Why would he tell the people to "see" using the singular form, but speak of himself as placing the choice before them in the plural form?

Mori Ve'rebbi Rav Asher Weiss explained based on the Gemara's teaching in Maseches Kiddushin (40b), brought by the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva (3:4), that we should always see the world as חציו חיוב וחצי זכאי - precisely balanced between sins and merits. If the world's "account" is exactly even, then a single mitzva that any individual performs tilts the scales in the world's favor, and a single misdeed can tilt the scales against it. Every time we have the opportunity to perform a mitzva, we need to consider the possibility that this mitzva might make all the difference, and literally save humanity. When we feel like staying in bed instead of getting up to go to shul on time, we should think of the profound impact which this mitzva could potentially have upon the world. Conversely, when we are tempted to act wrongly, to say something hurtful, to share a piece of gossip, or to open an inappropriate website, we should consider the potential repercussions of this single act upon the world.

Rav Weiss explained that Moshe turns to each and every individual and says, ראה - to see the impact that we have. Even though Moshe presents the ברכה and קללה to the entire nation - לפניכם - nevertheless, each of us must assume personal responsibility, recognizing the potential impact of every action we perform. This awareness should motivate us to be mindful, to be conscientious, to live meaningfully, to seize every mitzva opportunity and avoid wrongdoing.

IDENTIFYING AS "I"

Reb Meir of Premishlan

"See, I place before you today, a blessing and a curse..." (11:26)

Re'eh Anochi ("See, I") can refer to the "I," or ego, which for every person can be "a blessing and a curse." The "blessing" refers to the "I" that sees that his greatness should be used for the sake of heaven to ascend to higher and more mature spiritual levels as he performs the mitzvot. The "curse" of the inner "I" occurs when "you will not listen." When one prides himself on his greatness and becomes egocentric, then that is a real "curse."

DAILY BLESSINGS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"See, I place before you today, a blessing..." (11:26)

The word "today" appears to be superfluous. However, as is known, "in His goodness, G-d perpetually renews the work of Creation" (Liturgy, blessing before the morning Shema). Every day, He bestows new illumination and confers new benevolence. The person who worships G-d receives this daily in the form of enlightenment and new insight.

This, then, is the deeper significance of the verse "See, I set before you today" - in the same vein as what our Sages said, "Today - every day, it should be in your eyes as if it were new," implying that every day a person receives new blessings and kindness from G-d (Sifri 6:6; see Rashi on Devarim 26:16).

FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"The blessing, if you listen to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d..." (11:27)

Moshe sets before the people a blessing and a curse (with regard to keeping the commandments) and states, "The blessing that you will heed the commandments" (11:27). Would it not be more apropos to use the conditional "If you keep the commandments," since both the blessing and the curse are presented as possible outcomes?

Rav Hirsch suggests that observing G-d's commandments is itself a blessing. If we start with a foundation of faith, then our actions become natural expressions of that faith, instead of commandments we must simply obey.

Our attitude frames the act, not just with the observance of G-d's laws, but with all our relationships, both with G-d (bein adam laMakom) and with each other (bein adam l'chaveiro). If our interpersonal relationships lead us to express love, gratitude, and faith, how much more so should our relationship with G-d inspire similar emotions and ideals? Starting from a place of faith and trust in each other can lead to beautiful expressions of love with every act.

THE TRUE BLESSING

Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch

“The blessing, if you listen to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d...” (11:27)

Just the ability to be able to listen to Hashem’s commandments is in itself a blessing. Every Jew should merit being able to hear and absorb the words of Hashem and His Torah in his very soul.

BLESSED FOR HEARKENING

Malbim / Chernovitz Rebbe

“And the curse, if you shall not hearken to the commandment of Hashem, your G-d, but turn aside out of the way...” (11:28)

Why is the threat of the curse given with an added qualification, “but turn aside out of the way,” while the promise of the blessing carries no other prerequisite than “if you shall hearken?”

Because the Holy One, blessed be He, regards even good intention as equal to the deed. Accordingly, even “hearkening” in itself, without the actual performance of the good deed, is rewarded by a blessing. Evil intentions, on the other hand, are not judged as evil deeds in themselves. Therefore, the curse does not come as soon as you “do not hearken” but only after you have actually “turned aside, out of the way that I command you this day.”

FROM MOLEHILL TO MOUNTAIN

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And then you shall deliver the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eival.” (11:29)

The Yerushalmi (Sotah 30a, quoted by Tosefos) cites the opinion of Rabbi Elazar that the great mountains of Gerizim and Eival, which hosted the Jewish People as they heard the blessings and curses, were nothing more than mere mounds of earth that the Jewish People put together, and not the mighty ascents that their names give them credit for.

From here we can learn an incredible lesson: Despite their actual size, the Torah calls Gerizim and Eival “mountains” because of what they did, not how they were made. How much more so is our name dependent upon our actions and achievements and not on how we were made?

In fact, the Midrash (Tanchumah, Vayakhel 1) states this principle emphatically: “There are three names that a person is called; one is the name that his father and mother give him, one is what he is known by, and one is a name that he acquires for himself - the best of all of them is the name that he acquires for himself.

One person who certainly lacked “physical stature” but who nevertheless acquired the name “Rebbe” for the life-

lesson he taught to those around him was Reb Moshe Cohen from Lelov, who became fully paralyzed besides for his speech and eye-movement. Yet, describes Rav Elimelech Biderman, he was in a constant state of happiness. One day, his son asked him how he can be so happy all the time with such a difficult life. To which Reb Moshe responded: “If everyone would have been born with my disease and everyone would be limited like me, would I be fine with the situation? Of course. So why should I not be happy? Because other people can walk and are healthy, that’s a reason that I should not be happy?!” With this message, Reb Moshe inspired countless people to be happy with their lives and cope with their challenges.

We too should recognize that with whatever nature we were born, whatever intelligence, resources, or skills we possess, the way Hashem views us is by what we achieve in life. In this way, even mountains can become molehills and molehills can become mountains.

POWER SOURCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You must utterly eradicate their deities from all the places where the nations whom you will dispossess worshiped, upon the lofty mountains, upon the hills, and under every lush tree.” (12:2)

G-d is the source of all power and potential in the world, including our own (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 5). The Baal Shem Tov teaches us that we must keep this truth constantly in mind, for if we allow it to slip from our consciousness, we will perforce look to other sources of power (such as “nature” or “ego”), ascribing to them the ability to act on their own. This is a subtle form of idolatry.

Furthermore, this misconstruction is diametrically opposed to the objective of the Torah and its commandments, which is to refine materiality so it can serve as a means to reveal Divinity rather than to obscure it.

It is therefore crucial that we “utterly eradicate” every vestige of this misconception. (Hitva’aduyot 5720, vol. 2, pp. 290-293) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

BECOMING ONE AGAIN

Imrei Emes

“You shall seek His dwelling, and there you shall come.” (12:5)

Why does the Torah first use the second person plural - tidreshu, “shall you seek,” and then switch to singular - u’vasa, “you shall come”? (The Hebrew term for “seek,” lidrosh, also denotes “inquiring after” a person or thing.)

With regard to Zion, G-d’s habitation, the Sages (Rosh Hashanah 30) say: “She is Zion; there is none that inquires after her. From this we learn that she ought to be inquired after.”

What exactly is the “search” or “inquiry” implied in this pasuk? It is an “inquiry” or “investigation” into the conditions that caused the Bais HaMikdash’s destruction, followed by an effort to correct these problems so that the Bais HaMikdash could be rebuilt. The cause of the Second Bais HaMikdash’s destruction was the hatred without just cause that disrupted the Jews’ unity. The remedy for this evil is the restoration of mutual love and unity in Israel.

Hence, the message inherent in this pasuk is as follows: “Unto His habitation shall you seek”: You shall try to find the causes of His habitation’s destruction. Do that and you’ll discover how you have become “plural,” i.e., divided into countless opposing factions.

The way to remedy this evil is to unite - to become “singular,” as one again - and then “you shall come” to Zion as one person, a people welded together by the powerful force of unity.

OUR INNER MOSHE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“You shall seek His dwelling, and there you shall come.” (12:5)

The word for “there” [שמה] is composed of the same letters as Moshe’s name [משה]. This will be understood based on what is written in the Tikkunim (Tikkunei Zohar 69; 111b) on the verse (Tehillim 33:14), “From His dwelling place, He oversees all the inhabitants of the earth”: The initials of the first three words for “From His dwelling place” [ממכון שבתו השגיוח] form the name of Moshe. Our Sages (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:64) say, “Moshe is equivalent to all of Yisrael,” and each Jew has to develop within himself the aspect of Moshe.

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the verse “From His dwelling place, He oversees all the inhabitants of the earth.” Through Moshe, G-d oversees “all the inhabitants of the earth” - referring to the Jewish people. This is the mystical sense of the phrase “And come there [שמה]” - indicating that through the aspect of Moshe within you, you will reach the spiritual level of the Shechinah dwelling within you. This, then, is the deeper meaning of “You shall seek His dwelling and come there.”

STABLE DEVOTIONS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Now you have not yet come to the resting place and the heritage that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you.” (12:9)

This phrase refers to stability in one’s devotions and, by extension, to Torah study and service of G-d - for without the latter, there is no stability. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 68a)

REST FROM OUR ENEMIES

Reb Noson of Breslov

“You will cross the Jordan and settle in the land that Hashem, your G-d, is causing you to inherit. Then He will give you rest from all your enemies that surround you, and you will dwell securely.” (12:10)

This blessing occurred during the reign of Dovid HaMelech. Only then could the Jews build the Temple. (Rashi)

Dovid HaMelech represents the power of prayer. Only through the power of Dovid HaMelech’s tehillim - his prayers and supplications to G-d - can we attain peace and rest from our enemies. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 45a)

SPIRITUAL JERUSALEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Regarding the place to which Hashem, your G-d, will choose to attach His Name...” (12:11)

Jerusalem is “the place to which G-d chose to attach His Name” as the exclusive and eternal site of the holy Temple. Nevertheless, wherever we are, we can transform that location into a miniature, spiritual “Jerusalem” by serving G-d there, spiritually elevating and refining ourselves and our environment. (Sefer HaChaim 5:1)

This truth is reflected in the fact that wherever we pray, we face Jerusalem. By facing Jerusalem, we connect our local “Jerusalem” to Jerusalem itself, as our prayers ascend to heaven via the spiritual portal of the site of the holy Temple. Furthermore, by facing the real Jerusalem, we express our hope that G-d will soon redeem us from our exile, and we will, living in the Land of Israel, be able to experience the spiritual exaltation that will be available to us when the holy Temple is finally rebuilt.

By transforming our local environment into a spiritual “Jerusalem” while simultaneously yearning to serve G-d in Jerusalem itself, we can hasten the advent of our own personal redemption, as well as the ultimate, Messianic Redemption of humanity as a whole. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 617-619) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ATTAINING TRUE HAPPINESS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And you shall rejoice in front of Hashem, your G-d...” (12:12)

The Torah states these words in the context of the obligation to bring the korbanos to the Beis HaMikdash. Rav Avraham of Slonim (Torah Avos) suggests an alternative explanation to these words.

He points out that the Torah is highlighting how one can achieve genuine and authentic joy. One can experience true happiness when he or she is in the presence of Hashem, our Creator. A person does not need outside influences or stimuli to attain happiness. Instead, bringing Hashem into one's life, and thereby having emunah in all that Hashem does, will generate true simcha.

We live in a world in which people are struggling to find happiness. Everyone is searching for meaning and joy in their lives. Rav Avraham of Slonim is teaching us that happiness comes from one's relationship with Hashem and not from external sources.

Let us work towards creating more space for Hashem in our lives so that we can dwell in front of Him. This will help us find the true happiness that we are all desperately looking for.

HUMBLE RECTIFICATION

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You should slaughter your cattle and your sheep that G-d has given you in the manner that I have commanded you. Then you can eat the meat in your cities, in any way you desire." (12:21)

One of the laws of shechitah calls for the blood to be poured upon the earth and covered. "Earth" represents humility, which is a key means for rectifying one's soul. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 5a)

GROWTH MINDSET

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Only your holy offerings that you will have and your vow offerings you shall carry and come to the place that Hashem will choose." (12:26)

Moshe informs the people of the new laws that will be initiated once they enter Israel, including the requirement that only holy offerings be brought to the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. However, the pasuk does not specify that the Mikdash will be in Yerushalayim; instead, it says "to the place that G-d will choose" (12:26). Why is Yerushalayim referred to indirectly?

Rabbi Yaakov Trump suggests that the significance of Yerushalayim is not [only] the place itself but the idea of striving toward a closer relationship with G-d and perpetually seeking personal growth.

This speaks to the importance of having a growth mindset, both personally and communally.

GUARANTEED SUCCESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Safeguard all these words that I am commanding you, and hearken, that it may benefit you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and proper in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d." (12:28)

G-d asks of us only what He gives us the power to do (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:3), and crowns - our sincere efforts with success (Torah Ohr 86c). Thus, all the commandments in the Torah can be seen as empowerments and promises. The very fact that G-d has commanded us to do what He asks of us means that He has already given us the power to do it.

In other words, doing "what is good in the eyes of G-d" and what is "proper in the eyes of humanity" is not only possible; G-d promises us that - if we study the Torah devotedly and follow its directives - we will succeed. We will become sources of illumination and inspiration to the world around us, guiding them to lead lives of goodness and devotion to G-d. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

TESTS OF FAITH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d is testing you to determine whether you really love G-d with all your heart and all your soul." (13:4)

We are tested when we suffer despite our loyalty to G-d; we assume that if we follow G-d's will, we are entitled to His favor. Voices from both within and without mock our apparently naive belief.

When G-d's presence is hidden in these situations, it simply means that He wishes to grace us with a closer, more intense relationship with Him. In order to preserve our faith in G-d in the face of situations that test this faith, we have to draw upon deeper levels of commitment than we normally do.

When we pass the test, maintaining our implicit faith in G-d, the suffering disappears, its purpose having been served. Our formerly deep, hidden connection with G-d becomes our new normative consciousness. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5708, pp. 94-103; Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 286-287) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CLEAVING TO HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"After Hashem, your G-d, shall you walk, and Him shall you fear, and His commandments shall you keep, and to His voice shall you hearken, and Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave." (13:5)

If we are already "following G-d, keeping His commandments, heeding His voice, and worshipping Him," what is left to do in order to "cleave to Him"?

"Cleaving to G-d" means acting as He does, exhibiting kindness and concern for all creatures by helping them in their time of need. True, this type of behavior is largely included in "keeping His commandments," many of which require us to extend our help to others. But, in addition, the Torah is bidding us to identify with G-d so thoroughly, to merge our consciousness with His so totally, that we do what He does naturally, rather than out of the obligation of being commanded to do so.

The Torah is justified in this expectation inasmuch as we all possess a Divine soul, a “veritable part of G-d above” (Iyov 31:2). The more we enable our Divine soul to express itself (by following G-d, keeping His commandments, heeding His voice, and worshipping Him), the more we can ultimately identify with G-d Himself.

ATTACHMENT THROUGH DEVOTION

Reb Noson of Breslov

“After Hashem, your G-d, shall you walk, and Him shall you fear, and His commandments shall you keep, and to His voice shall you hearken, and Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave.” (13:5)

Tidbakun (devote yourselves) literally means “attach yourselves.” A person must do both, to the best of his ability: he must perform the mitzvos and thereby attach himself to G-d, and he must attach himself to G-d in all circumstances and devotions.

UNITED STRENGTH

Imrei Emes

“After Hashem, your G-d, shall you walk, and Him shall you fear, and His commandments shall you keep, and to His voice shall you hearken, and Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave.” (13:5)

Much the same has already been said in the preceding parsha (10:20): “You shall fear Hashem, your G-d, Him shall you serve and to Him shall you cleave.” Why, then, is the commandment repeated at this point, and in the plural?

It is because of the critical situation the Torah is dealing with. In normal circumstances, it is enough if an individual fears G-d and serves Him, each person for himself or herself. But when instigators and seducers are out in the world, an individual can accomplish nothing but must join with all other like-minded persons to form a group to resist these evil people.

Since the Torah is dealing here with the trouble caused by false prophets (see pesukim 1-4), the Torah repeats the commandment in the plural to imply that in such situations all individuals must become part of a group to carry out the command, “Him shall you fear, and His commandments shall you keep, and to His voice shall you hearken, and Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave.”

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMITMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“If your brother, the son of your mother; your son; your daughter; the wife of your embrace; or your friend who is as your own soul incites you in secret, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other deities, which neither you nor your fathers have known.’” (13:7)

Allegorically, all the relations mentioned in this verse are aspects of our own personalities - our intellect and emotions (see Ohr HaChaim on this verse). Although we must make full use of our intellect and emotions in our spiritual life, we must be aware of their potential to lead us astray.

The only attribute of ours that we can unhesitatingly rely upon to keep us true to our Divine selves is our fundamental bond with G-d. This fundamental bond expresses itself as our unconditional commitment to G-d’s purposes and agenda, regardless of what our intellect or emotions might be whispering in our ear at any particular moment. When we strengthen this fundamental commitment to G-d, we can be assured that our intellect and emotions will never be enticed to lead us astray. On the contrary, they will only aid us in enhancing our connection to G-d, the ultimate source of all truth. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DESTROYING THE SOURCE

Avnei Ezel

“You shall gather all the spoils [of the forsaken city] into the midst of the open square and you shall burn with fire the city and all its spoil...” (13:17)

If an entire city could be led to worship idols, it is obvious that its people cared only to amass riches and had no interest in life’s loftier things. This explains why they descended so low that they could be convinced to become pagans. Certainly, then, it is only appropriate that all the enormous wealth that caused them to descend to this terrible state should be absolutely destroyed.

RESTORING BALANCE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You shall gather all the spoils [of the forsaken city] into the midst of the open square and you shall burn with fire the city and all its spoil... So that G-d may... grant you compassion and be compassionate with you...” (13:17-18)

Moshe cautions the people that should an entire city turn to idolatry, it would need to be completely destroyed; all of its inhabitants would need to be killed, and the city would never be allowed to be rebuilt (thankfully, this never happened). The next pasuk (verse) tells us that G-d will grant us compassion and be compassionate with us (13:18). It would seem a little late for compassion after having destroyed an entire city, so why is this reassurance even mentioned?

Ohr Hachaim suggests that it is precisely because of the unthinkable things that we have had to do that G-d promises us an added level of compassion - not toward us, but in order for us to retain our humanity. When we do things outside of our nature, even if it is required and expected of us, it influences our consciousness, something that needs to be acknowledged in order for it to be dealt with and restored.

When forced outside of our nature, re-centering ourselves and our capacity for compassion is a key step in restoring internal balance among our community and within ourselves as well.

CORRESPONDING COMPASSION

Baal Shem Tov

“So that G-d may... grant you compassion and be compassionate with you...” (13:18)

“Grant you compassion” refers to our ability to be compassionate. The phrase “be compassionate with you” implies that as a result of our compassionate acts, G-d showers us with overt compassion, because G-d mirrors our deeds. When we exercise a particular attribute, G-d activates His corresponding attribute.

It is important to realize this in order to be properly motivated in Divine service. If we believe our mortal deeds have no influence in heaven, we will not bother to serve G-d. This is humility taken to an unhealthy extreme, similar to our Sages statement, “The humility of Reb Zechariah caused the [Temple’s] destruction.” It leads to a complete lack of accountability.

The truth is that every mortal thought, word, or deed reverberates loudly in heaven. If they are positive, they sustain the angels, illuminate the heavens, and provide G-d with the satisfaction He eagerly awaits.

If we truly understood this, we would throw ourselves eagerly into G-d’s service and carefully weigh every move and thought.

CHAIN REACTION COMPASSION

Rebbe Nachman

“And [Hashem will] grant you compassion and be compassionate with you and multiply you as He swore to your forefathers.” (13:18)

Our Sages (Berakhot 33a) teach: “It is forbidden to show compassion to a person who lacks da’at (awareness).”

This is because such compassion will be wasted - for instance, such a person may give money to a drug addict, who will just use it to buy more drugs.

But when a person gives charity properly and demonstrates proper compassion, he “will have compassion bestowed upon him” (Shabbat 151b). And since it is forbidden to show compassion to one who lacks da’at, he will be granted da’at as well. This means that he will be protected from sinning, since sin is associated with foolishness and a lack of da’at (cf. Sotah 3a). (See Likutey Moharan I, 116)

Through our prayers, we draw G-d’s compassion to the world. And when G-d bestows His compassion upon people, they will extend that compassion to each other.

PASSION FOR COMPASSION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And [Hashem will] grant you compassion and be compassionate with you and multiply you as He swore to your forefathers.” (13:18)

The beautiful middah of mercy is a G-d-given gift. It is something that lies within every single Jew. Most of us know how and when to use it. Unfortunately, for some, it remains very much within and has yet to see the light of day. It is the job of every Jew to externalize this trait and put it to good use.

What exactly is the middah of rachmanus (compassion) and how does one apply it? Sefer Ma’alas HaMiddos asks this very question and answers by giving a few examples: One who lends money to a poor person and later tells him it is a gift, one who feels pain over the worries of his friend; one who finds a lost object and returns it without fanfare.

What do all these examples have in common? They all go one step beyond chessed. They show that the person is not just doing a good deed, but that he truly cares about another person’s feelings and doing kindness for him. Some people do chessed because it’s the “right” thing to do or it gives them a good feeling. In truth, what they are doing is chessed for themselves. (Note: That’s fine. One who does chessed for himself is also a good Jew!) But this is not the level we are striving for, and certainly does not bring out the rachmanus that is inside. A Jew must aim higher.

When you do a kindness for someone, close your eyes and try to imagine how the other person feels. By feeling the other person’s pain or need, you are not only a ba’al chessed, a “master of kindness,” but you are exercising that beautiful attribute of a Jew, the middah of true rachmanus. (Dargah Yeseirah)

APPROACHING HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You are children to Hashem, your G-d. You shall not cut yourselves, and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person...” (14:1)

It was the practice of the ancient idolatrous nations to cut themselves and rip out the hair on their head as a sign of mourning for their dead.

This verse teaches us that even those who have sunk so spiritually low that they need to be warned not to engage in the practices of pagan, idolatrous peoples are still children of G-d. They can, at any time, approach G-d directly, as children approaching their parents.

This direct connection with G-d enables us to always put our spiritual concerns first, viewing our material concerns simply as ways of aiding us in our pursuit of our spiritual ends and fulfilling our Divine mission. (Hitva’aduyot 5728, vol. 3, pp. 426-428) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ROYAL CHILDREN

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You are children to Hashem, your G-d..." (14:1)

It therefore behooves you to act as royalty. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 208; see also Rashi)

HASHEM'S ONLY CHILD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You are children to Hashem, your G-d..." (14:1)

In the words of Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism, "Every Jew is as precious to G-d as an only son born to his parents in their old age - and, in fact, even more precious."

G-d created the world for the sake of the Jewish people, having charged them with the mission of transforming it into His home. This challenge is not only the mission of the Jewish people as a whole, but of each individual Jew. Therefore, we should all live our lives as if the entire world were created for each of us individually, and awaits our unique contributions to its destiny. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 982) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FAMILY REUNION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"You are children to Hashem, your G-d. You shall not cut yourselves, and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person..." (14:1)

What is the connection between the privilege of being Hashem's children and the prohibition of making incisions on one's body as a sign of mourning?

Rav Yisrael Meir Druck (Aish Tomid) offers an interpretation of this pasuk, based on the Gemara in Yevamos (13b). He explains that when the Torah uses the words "lo sisG-didu," it is warning us not to make "agudos agudos" - separate groups, within the Jewish people. Instead, we need to make sure that we are unified. Based on this, Rav Druck suggests that the Torah is teaching us that as the children of Hashem, we need to make sure to get along and not create divisiveness. Like parents, Hashem can't bear to see His children argue and quarrel.

As we enter the month of Elul, we must not only evaluate ourselves and identify areas that we need to improve as individuals, but we also need to do what we can to ensure that we treat each and every person with dignity and respect. We must work on strengthening Klal Yisrael as a cohesive unit so that our Avinu SheBashamayim (our Father in Heaven) continues to derive much nachas from His children.

SANCTIFIED UTILIZATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"But you must not eat [the following animals]... for they bring up their cud, but their hoof is not split..." (14:7)

G-d created everything for a purpose (Avot 6:11), and it is our task to help each component of creation fulfill its purpose. In many cases, we accomplish this by making active use of the item in question - for example, by using it to fulfill some commandment. In other cases, however, we accomplish this goal passively - for example, by avoiding the item in question or not using it. In those cases, we elevate the object by avoiding it.

G-d commands us not to consume non-kosher animals since they originate in the realm of spirituality that is beyond our ability to elevate through eating. In their case, we elevate them by fulfilling G-d's commandment to abstain from eating them.

On the other hand, these animals can be elevated directly and actively by using them for purposes other than eating. For example, when a donkey or horse transports a person to perform a commandment, it, too, is infused with holiness.

By utilizing everything in our lives for fulfilling our Divine mission, we sanctify all aspects of reality with which Divine providence has put us in contact. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 15, p. 281; Hitva'aduyot 5743, vol. 4, p. 1928) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

STAYING POSITIVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"But you must not eat [the following animals]... for they bring up their cud, but their hoof is not split..." (14:7)

Parashas Re'eh lists the kosher and non-kosher animals and specifies the features that make animals kosher that they chew their cud and have split hooves, the absence of which makes them non-kosher (14:6).

The Torah lists several non-kosher animals that have one of the two requirements but lack the second. Rabbi Yissocher Frand asks why the Torah indicates the features of these animals that would make them kosher if they already have the feature that makes them non-kosher.

The Midrash explains that it's important to mention positive attributes whenever possible, even when discussing something primarily negative.

Nestled in a parashah that mentions the directive to be "joyful" no less than seven times, the takeaway is clearly to be positive toward life and each other, despite restrictions we may face.

KINDNESS OF THE STORK

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

“But these are the birds of which you shall not eat... and the stork and the heron after its kinds...” (14:18)

Why is the stork called chasidah (lit., “the kind one”)? Because it deals kindly with its fellow creatures. (Rashi, to Vayikra 11:19)

Our Sages (Talmud Yerushalmi, Bava Metzia 3) say that mice are evil because they call all the other mice to eat after they themselves have eaten their fill of the food they have found.

When the stork shares its food with other storks it is regarded as an act of kindness and the stork is called *chasidah*. Why, then, should mice be judged as evil when they do the same thing?

The mice call their fellow creatures to eat the wealth of others, and only after they themselves have eaten their fill of it. This is evil. The stork, on the other hand, gives to its comrades only from that portion of food that it has been given as its own share.

The stork’s kindness lies in that it does good with its own portion, and not with the wealth of others.

CHARITY LEADS TO WEALTH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You must tithe all the produce of the seed that the field yields year by year.” (14:22)

This verse includes the instruction to donate a portion of our income to charity. The Talmudic sages pointed out that the similarity of the Hebrew words for “tithe” (ta’aseir) and “become rich” (titasheir) alludes to the fact that G-d rewards those who give charity with abundant wealth.

Furthermore, when we resolve to give charity beyond our means, G-d grants us the wealth that is required in order for us to give the charity we have resolved to donate. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 14, p. 211) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

GUARANTEED WEALTH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“You must tithe all the produce of the seed that the field yields year by year.” (14:22)

By doubling the words “aser te’aser” (you must surely tithe) in the pasuk, the Torah is promising every Jew: “aser bishvil shetis’asher” - “Tithe (give charity) in order that you will become rich” (Sifri).

This guarantee is not contingent upon any other variable. If a person is careful to give a tenth of his earnings (ma’aser) to charity, there is no question that he will become wealthy.

Not only that, say the commentators, but his wealth will make him happy, content and a living embodiment of the words in Avos (3:1): “Who is rich? One who is satisfied with his lot.” What greater blessing can one receive?

GET MORE TO GIVE MORE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You must tithe all the produce of the seed that the field yields year by year.” (14:22)

We are told that each year, we should ma’aser (tithe) all our crops and earnings (14:22). The pasuk uses double language for the word tithe (asser t’asser), literally tithe to tithe, leading many commentaries to suggest that one should “tithe to become wealthy.” The K’sav Sofer asks how we have come to understand the second “t’asser” to mean wealth, when the Hebrew word for wealth is “t’asher”?

The K’sav Sofer answers his own question by indicating that since one would not be able to give more tithes if they didn’t gain more assets, one must tithe in order to gain more assets and be able to tithe on those as well. The K’sav Sofer adds that if one earns with the intent to tithe, that desire to do more good with one’s resources will facilitate their earning more assets with which to do good.

BLESSED WITH OPPORTUNITY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“You must tithe all the produce of the seed that the field yields year by year.” (14:22)

Our Sages (Avos 4:2) teach, “The reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah.” Therefore, the Torah states that if you tithe one time, then you will merit tithing many times. When one plants the seed of a mitzvah in holiness, it is planted for eternity.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“You must tithe all the produce of the seed that the field yields year by year.” (14:22)

The idiom “surely tithe” is indicated by prefacing the infinitive before the verb [עשר תעשר, literally, “tithing, you shall tithe”]. Furthermore, the word for “you shall tithe” can be vocalized to read “you shall become rich,” and moreover, can also mean “tenfold richer,” for עשר also means ten. Thus, our Sages (Shabbos 119a) expounded this verse as follows: “Tithe so that you shall become rich.”

To understand this dictum, consider the following: When a person performs charity, the charity rises before the Almighty. Now, by way of analogy, when a person gives a single golden coin or a single portion of grain as a tithe, and that charity ascends above, G-d considers from where

this tithe originated. Did it not come because the person had ten golden coins or ten portions of grain? Thus, all ten coins and ten portions of grain are included in this mitzvah, for it was because the person had ten golden coins or ten portions of grain that he was able to give a single golden coin or a single portion to charity.

In this way, the person merits that in the following year, he will earn ten times as much, and thus be able to give ten golden coins and ten portions as his tithe, implying that he will actually own a hundred golden coins and a hundred portions of grain. Thus, from all the grain that a person possessed at first - i.e., ten measures, from which he was able to give a single portion as a tithe - he merits in the upcoming year to be able to give a tithe from a hundred. This is because not only the tithe itself that is given is considered to be a mitzvah, but all the property that he had, which generated the tithe, is also included as part of the mitzvah, as explained above.

This, on a deeper level, explains the double verb in Hebrew: Tithing - When you give a tithe: You will tithe - all the seed crop you own will be tenfold next year. Next year, you will merit giving, as a tithe, a measure equivalent to what you owned the previous year. This, then, is the allusion in the teaching of our Sages "Tithe so that you shall become wealthy."

GOOD COMPANY

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"And you shall eat before Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose to rest His Name there... so that you will learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the ways." (14:23)

What does "eating before Hashem" have to do with "you will learn to fear Hashem"?

The Torah is warning us that when we sit down to eat, we should be careful that we sit with people who will be ready to "learn to fear Hashem."

PARADOX OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Convert it into money and bind the money in your hand when you go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose." (14:25)

We see here that the Torah does not make unreasonable demands upon us. On the other hand, the Torah insists that we never give the limitations of nature more consideration than they deserve. We see this in the laws of the commandment discussed in this verse: If, after transferring the holy status of the produce to money, we then transfer its status back to some other produce, we must eat this produce in Jerusalem; we cannot transfer it to a second amount of money (Mishnah Torah, Maaser Sheini 7:1). Once we have "satisfied" the limitations of nature, we may not succumb to them any further.

Thus, part of spiritual life entails becoming expert in navigating the paradox of accommodating the limitations of nature while also transcending them. (Hitva'aduyot 5726, vol. 4, pp. 71-73) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CONTROL OF WEALTH

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Convert it into money and bind the money in your hand when you go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose." (14:25)

A person's money is like his soul. One should take care to keep his money "together," bound in his hand - meaning, he should not let his livelihood or wealth control him. Rather, he should control his money and not spread himself too thin. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 125a)

TOAST TO HASHEM

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"You may spend the money for whatever your soul desires - for cattle, or for flock, or for wine, or for strong drink... before Hashem, your G-d, and you shall rejoice - you and your household." (14:26)

This emphasizes the importance of brotherhood and joy. When Jews assemble and toast each other with l'chaim, it is considered serving Hashem.

AN ERA OF CHARITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[You must give so] the convert, the orphan, and the widow who are in your cities may eat and be satisfied, so that Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all the work of your hand that you do." (14:29)

We are taught in the Talmud (Avot 1:2) that "the world stands on three pillars: the study of the Torah, the worship of G-d, and acts of loving kindness." Thus, at all times, each of us has to engage in all three "pillars" in order to ensure that both the world in general and our personal, individual worlds stand on a firm basis.

Nonetheless, there were periods in Jewish history when our main focus was on the study of the Torah, and other periods when our main focus was on worship and prayer. In the present period, immediately preceding the final Redemption, our main focus is on charity - providing for the physical and spiritual needs of others (Igeret HaKodesh vol. 9, p. 114a).

We should even consider our study of the Torah, worship of G-d, and all the commandments and good deeds that we perform to be forms of charity, since their positive effects benefit the whole world, hastening the advent of the Messianic Redemption. (Sefer Ma'amarim Melukat, vol. 1, p. 109; Igrot HaKodesh, vol. 11, p. 418) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REPAYING ONE'S BROTHER

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"Every creditor shall release his authority over what he has lent his fellow; he shall not press his fellow or his brother..." (15:2)

The Torah requires cancelling debts owed by fellow Jews every seven years. Hillel, in the first century C.E., saw that people were not lending money as the shemitta year approached, out of fear of losing their money, and so he instituted the pruzbul system, circumventing this prohibition and allowing for the collection of debts.

The Mishna in Maseches Shevi'is (10:9) teaches that if a borrower offers to repay the loan even after the shemita year, when the debts are cancelled, *הימנו נוחה חכמים רוח* (literally, "the Sages are pleased with him") – meaning, this is a virtuous deed for which he should be praised. Although the lender is required to waive the debt, the borrower is encouraged to repay it.

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch offers a beautiful insight into this halacha. He notes that in presenting the mitzva of *שמיטת כספים* (the cancellation of debts), the Torah commands, *לא יגוש את רעהו ואת אחיו* - that the lender is forbidden from claiming the money from "his friend" or from "his brother." The Torah emphasizes the kinship between the lender and the borrower - that the borrower is a friend and a brother.

Rav Hirsch writes that the purpose of this mitzva is not the actual cancellation of the debt, but rather that the borrower should return the money voluntarily. Instead of repaying the debt compulsorily, due to a formal contractual agreement, the borrower will repay the money out of a feeling of kinship toward the lender.

The command of *שמיטת כספים* is intended to change the whole nature of the relationship, highlighting the close bond between all Jews. It wants to draw our attention to the fact that all Am Yisrael are "friends" and "brothers," that we are like family, who help one another even without contractual obligations.

And thus, the Torah requires cancelling debts every seven years - not so that the lender will lose his money, but rather so that the borrower will repay out of love and devotion, and not merely due to a technical, legal responsibility.

PURPOSE OF TEHILLIM

Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin

"If there be a needy person among you, one of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your needy brother." (15:7)

By rearranging the words *"lo tikpotz et yadcha ha'evyon"* (nor shall you shut your hand from your needy brother), the first letters spell tehillim (psalms).

One may say psalms in times of agony or joy; however, the importance of saying psalms is to help people in need.

IMPARTIAL KINDNESS

Imrei Shefer

"If there be a needy person among you, one of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your needy brother." (15:7)

The Torah already speaks of "a needy person among you, one of your brethren" at the outset of the pasuk. Why, then, does it repeat "your needy brother" at the end?

This is done to show us what our attitude should be toward the needy, regardless of the suppliant's background.

As a rule, when the suppliant is a refined person of distinguished background, one will be much more inclined to help than one would an ordinary beggar with no particular distinction. Therefore, the Torah states: "If there be a needy person among you, one of your brethren" - when a needy, honorable person from a good family comes to you - one of your kind, in your community - I, G-d, am sure that "you will not harden your heart" but will gladly give him what he needs, because you will be compelled by your own heart to do so. But I require of you that you shall not "shut your hand from your needy brother" - that if an ordinary beggar from your community comes to you and your heart does not compel you to help him because he has no particular distinction, don't shut your hand but assist him even if you feel quite indifferent to him.

OPENING OUR HANDS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"You shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your needy brother. Open your hand generously and extend to him any credit he needs to take care of his wants..." (15:7-8)

Since the natural implication of hardening one's heart in this context is that he will not give to his needy brother, why then does the verse add the seemingly superfluous words, "Or close your hand against your needy brother"? Obviously if his heart is hardened, his hands are closed!

The Vilna Gaon understands that the imagery of a closed and open hand teaches us a fundamental lesson in giving tzedakah.

He explains that when one's hand is closed, his fingers appear to be of equal length; however, with an open hand, one sees that his fingers are different sizes. So too, explains the Vilna Gaon, when giving tzedakah to someone, we must recognize that each individual is exactly that - an individual, with unique needs and requirements, and the obligation to help him reflects this (Ha'Maor HaGadol, quoting the Imrei Noam Al HaTorah).

(In fact, the Gemara [Kesuvos 67b] learns from this verse that even someone who is used to great luxuries [such as having a servant run in front of his horse] and then falls upon hard times can have his needs [luxuries] paid for

from tzedakah. For as long as this is his need, he is essentially no different than someone who was always poor and has his own more meager needs.)

Therefore, both aspects of the verse are necessary. The first, directing us not to harden our hearts, is warning us not to refuse to give anything. The second, telling us to open our hand, is teaching us that when we do give, we should do so while recognizing that just as our fingers are different lengths, so too the person before us has different needs than the previous person who needed our assistance as well as the next person who will need our help.

(This approach also answers why the verse includes the additional words insisting that we open our hands even though the verse previously instructed us not to close our hands.)

Someone who understood this lesson and opened her hand in quite a literal sense was Rebbetzin Rivky Holtzberg, who ran the Chabad House in Mumbai before being murdered in a terrorist attack a few years ago. During the shivah, a young Israeli woman approached Rivky's mother and handed her a small package containing Rivky's diamond ring and her finest Shabbos dress.

"How did you get these?" Rivky's mother said in shock.

"I was just in India and found myself in trouble with bad people who had connections to the police. I was grabbed one day and thrown into jail. You cannot begin to imagine what a terrible place it was, and no one knew I was there. But I managed to bribe a guard to let me escape. I ran straight to the Chabad House where I knew I would be looked after. Your daughter welcomed me, fed me, and insisted that I leave the country. Knowing that I might get caught at the border, she gave me her best Shabbos dress and diamond ring. 'If you look very dignified, like a well-dressed married woman with a ring on your finger,' she said, 'they won't look too closely at you!' She was right. I wasn't checked. And I arrived home safely."

GIVING WITH CARE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"If there be a needy person among you, one of your brethren... You shall surely give him and let your heart not feel bad when you give him..." (15:7-10)

The repetition of the words "give him" in the above verse is confusing; the Torah could have been written in a more simple way: "You shall surely give him and let your heart not feel bad." Why was the Torah written with the seemingly superfluous words "when you give him" at the end of the verse?

Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky answers this question with the following story:

The Brisker Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soleveitchik, was famous for his vast Torah knowledge and impressive humility. He was once traveling at night, alone in the freezing cold and in need of a place to stay. He finally reached an inn, but was clearly not very welcome there. Not wanting to reveal his identity, it was only through pleading and by offering money that the innkeeper finally agreed to let the "stranger" into his inn and to lie down by the fire. During his short stay there, Rav Yosef Dov was treated very badly by the innkeeper, who even refused to give him any food except for a crust of bread and a glass of water which Rav Yosef Dov had to pay for.

The following morning, some of the town's notables entered the inn and asked, "We understand that the Brisker Rav was passing through this town. Is it possible that he came by your inn last night?" Before the innkeeper had a chance to dismiss their question, they saw Rav Yosef Dov enter the room. Immediately they approached him and welcomed him warmly to their town. Terribly embarrassed for the way that he had treated Rav Yosef Dov, the innkeeper rushed towards him to beg for forgiveness, saying "Rebbe. I am terribly sorry. I had no idea that you were the Brisker Rav. Please forgive me!"

Gently, the Brisker Rav replied, "I am sorry but that is impossible. You see, you are coming to ask forgiveness from the Brisker Rav, but that is not who you insulted. You insulted a poor simple Jew who came for lodging - and he is no longer here to forgive you!"

With this story, Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky suggests that the additional "give him" comes to teach us that when we give, we should not detach ourselves from the recipient of our "kindness." Meaning that we should not only give because it is a Mitzvah, rather, we are obligated to actually care for the person who is in need. This is what we see from the additional words "give him," which teaches us that when we "give," we must remember that we are giving to a "him" - a real person, someone like us who has needs the same way we do.

GIVING WITH EMPATHY

Rabbi Yaakov Neiman

"Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely grant him enough for his lack..." (15:8)

If one gives tzedakah solely with the intent to fulfill the Divine instruction of giving charity, he hasn't fulfilled the mitzvah to its highest level.

To fulfill this mitzvah properly, it is as if one must forget that there is a commandment in the first place. He gives because he sees his friend is hungry; he feels his pain. When his brother is cold, he feels a degree of suffering as well. One shouldn't just give to the needy and send them on their way; he must put himself in their shoes. (Darchei Mussar)

THE TRUEST CHARITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely grant him enough for his lack...” (15:8)

Mashal: A week before an upcoming holiday, a well-dressed lady walked into a local Jewish grocery store and immediately caught the attention of numerous fellow shoppers. She didn't appear to be from the neighborhood. In fact, she didn't appear to be religious at all. So why was she in this particular store?

One individual was curious and followed behind her to find out what she was doing there. He noticed that she was pushing a shopping cart with a few random items, while in her hand, she held what appeared to be a long list. The mystery deepened as she appeared to be avoiding the food aisles and made her way directly to the management office.

As he stood at a safe distance, pretending to mind his own business, he overheard the woman say to the manager, “Okay, here's my list. Please put \$1,000 on the Schwartz account, \$1,000 on the Goldberg account, \$1,000 on the Cohen account...” crediting a long list of families with thousands of dollars out of her own pocket.

Indeed, what this fellow was witnessing was a true act of tzedakah. This was charity given in the most respectful manner, with no begging, handouts or embarrassment. Real tzedakah v'chessed (charity and kindness).

Nimshal: For some people, the positive commandment to open one's hand to his poor brother is the only reason they give charity. But there are so many more people, Jews of all stripes, who don't need to be told to give; they feel it in their bones and they go out of their way to help another Jew in need.

What is “to cover the wants which he lacks”? When one gives charity with the sole intention of giving a poor person what he needs most, that is the truest kind of tzedakah.

THE MASTER KEY

Rebbe Nachman

“Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely grant him enough for his lack...” (15:8)

All beginnings are difficult. (Mekhilta, BaChodesh 2)

Many times, when a person begins something new, he faces obstacles. Therefore he should give charity first. Charity has the power to open all the doors that require opening, and can even widen openings that already exist.

However, like all beginnings, charity itself is difficult, which is why the Torah advises: “Open your hand generously.” This phrase may be translated more literally as “Open, you should open your hand.” (See Likutey Moharan II, 4:2)

UNLIMITED WILLPOWER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely grant him enough for his lack...” (15:8)

As finite beings living in a finite world, we are limited. This is especially clear with regard to charity. Our ability to give is limited by the resources that we have at our disposal. There is likewise a limit to the enthusiasm with which we can give, inasmuch as our enthusiasm results from our intellectual commitment and emotional involvement, which are also limited.

In contrast, there is relatively no limit to how much we can want something. Our will - relative to our ability to understand, feel, and act - is unlimited.

It is therefore crucial that we perform G-d's commandments willingly and wholeheartedly. Only then can the commandments we perform not be limited by the natural limitations of our abilities to understand, feel, and act. When we summon our unlimited willpower, we are capable of understanding, feeling, and acting far more than we originally thought.

By going beyond our natural limitations in performing G-d's will, especially with regard to charity, we elicit G-d's infinite beneficence. The ultimate expression of G-d's infinite beneficence will be the Messianic Redemption, in which the boundaries of nature - manifest as the constraints of exile - will be finally and irrevocably broken. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, pp. 86-88) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

POWER OF CHARITY

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him, and you shall surely grant him enough for his lack...” (15:8)

Even if you already gave, you should give - even a hundred times. (Sifri)

Many verses in the Torah contain repeated phrases, as we find in this passage. This teaches us the value of strengthening ourselves, again and again. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 113a-226)

By opening your hand and giving to others, you draw a spirit of life that brings vitality into your own life. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 137a)

The mitzvah of charity is comparable to fulfilling the entire Torah, because it creates an atmosphere of love and peace. Charity leads to unity, as it nullifies all the differences between people and points the way to truth, which is one. Furthermore, the giving of charity invokes forgiveness for all sins. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 194a)

HELPING HASHEM'S CHILDREN

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Look out for yourself, lest there be an evil thought in your mind... and you will not give him, and if he cries out concerning you to Hashem, you will be regarded as sinful." (15:9)

The Gemara (Bava Basra 10) relates that the Roman general Turnus-Rufus asked the Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva, "If, as you claim, your G-d loves the poor, why doesn't He support them?"

Rabbi Akiva answered, "He is giving the rest of us the opportunity to avoid the judgment of gehinom - purgatory, by supporting the poor."

Turnus-Rufus retorted, "To the contrary, for this you truly deserve punishment. If a king imprisons his servant and starves him, and another servant sneaks in and feeds him, does the latter not incur a punishment? Since you are called 'servants' as the scripture states, 'To Me, the children of Israel are servants,' how are you permitted do this?"

"That is the wrong analogy," Rabbi Akiva replied. "If a king imprisons his own son and starves him, and a servant sneaks in and feeds the king's son, doesn't he earn a great reward from the king? And furthermore, we are called "children" of Hashem, as it is written, "בנים אתם לה" - You are children to Hashem."

R' Akiva Eiger zt'l, explains this is what our pasuk means: "השמר לך פן יהיה דבר עם לבבך בליעל" - "Beware lest there be a lawless thought in your heart." Do not maintain that the poor do not deserve to be supported through our charity, because it is untrue. As a result, if you do that, "והיה בך חטא" - "it will be a sin against you" - you will not only forfeit the mitzvah of tzedakah, but you will be convicting yourself as well. Your actions suggest that we are not to be perceived as Hashem's children, but only as His servants, and as such, we feel no responsibility to assist our brethren in need.

OPENHEARTED CHARITY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You should surely give to him, and do not let your heart feel bad about giving to him. For because of this, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your endeavors and in everything you put your hand to." (15:10)

Because you won't harbor ill feelings when you give charity to the poor, G-d will bless you. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 1a)

Charity removes harsh decrees from this world. When a poor man cries out to G-d about the injustice of poverty, his cries and prayers raise the question "Why isn't anyone helping this poor man?" and arouse Divine anger and judgments (Zohar 1, 10b). One who gives charity to the poor man not only pushes off Divine judgments, but he actually transforms those judgments into compassion.

In order not to feel bad about giving charity, one must arouse himself to give charity with an open heart. Then he merits to G-d's blessing. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 5a)

Thus, it is written, "You should surely give to him, and do not let your heart feel bad about giving to him." That is, if you have bad feelings, you are arousing Divine anger and judgments. If you give with an open heart, you are opening the channels of blessing and removing harsh decrees from the world. (Likutey Halakhot VI, p. 114a)

GETTING BY GIVING

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"You should surely give to him, and do not let your heart feel bad about giving to him. For because of this, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your endeavors and in everything you put your hand to." (15:10)

Parashas Re'eh includes the precepts of tithing and giving charity to those in need. The pasuk tells us that the result of helping those less fortunate is that we will be blessed (15:10). The Lekach Tov asks: Does it not make more sense to reserve the blessings for those less fortunate so that they would not need the help of others?

The Lekach Tov answers that the blessing the giver receives is the very ability to help others, a benefit that would not be available if there was no one in need of help. There is a symbiotic relationship between a giver and a receiver, where they cannot exist without the other.

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig asserts that perhaps that is why the Hebrew word for giving, "nasan," is a palindrome - the giving goes in both directions, where everyone involved benefits.

PREPARED TO GIVE

Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Rosen

"You should surely give to him, and do not let your heart feel bad about giving to him. For because of this, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your endeavors and in everything you put your hand to." (15:10)

Naton titein (you should surely give) literally means "Give, you will give." The simple meaning of this directive is that when you earn income, you should set aside charity immediately, even if you don't have someone to give it to right away. Then, when a poor person does come along and asks for charity, you will have it ready for him.

But there is an even greater idea behind this. "Give" - when you set aside money for charity right away - then "you will give" - you will have it ready to give. Consequently, "you will not let your heart feel bad about giving to him" - since the money was already set aside, you won't feel bad about having to take it out of your pocket to give!

SPIRITUAL RICHES

Rabbi Shimon Shkop

“Since the poor will never cease to exist from the land, I am commanding you as follows: Open your hand generously to your brother, your poor and your needy who live in your land.” (15:11)

The Torah promises, “Tithe so that you will become rich.” This is not only true of monetary issues, but of spiritual ones as well. A rebbi or anyone who gives of his precious time to teach and instruct others in Torah, will merit “wealth and riches” in his own personal Torah learning.

CHANNELS OF BLESSING

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Since the poor will never cease to exist from the land, I am commanding you as follows: Open your hand generously to your brother, your poor and your needy who live in your land.” (15:11)

When the Jews obey G-d, there will not be any poor among them. But if they do not do G-d’s Will, then there will be poor among them. (Sifri)

Wealth comes to each person through his own channels of bounty. When the Jews obey G-d’s Will, bounty descends in proper order and is distributed evenly. “There will not be any poor among them” means that each person will enjoy plentiful blessing. But if the Jews transgress, the channels of bounty become misdirected. Now we understand why some people are extremely wealthy while others are sorely lacking. Bounty that should have descended to many people finds its way into one person’s pocket, and some people do not receive anything at all.

Giving charity rectifies this situation. When a person blessed with much wealth recognizes that some of it might not belong to him, and gives some of it to charity, he redirects the misdirected channels and enables everyone to receive bounty. His giving will not diminish his own fortune in any way, since by redirecting and reopening the existing channels of bounty, he allows for a greater and stronger flow of bounty for all mankind.

Therefore, it is written, “Open, you should open your hand.” By opening your hand to the poor, you open the channels of bounty to reach everyone else as well. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 145a-145b)

WORKING TOWARDS BLESSINGS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do...” (15:18)

Although G-d determines how well we will succeed in our efforts to earn a livelihood, we must not rely solely on His providence, but must put forth reasonable efforts to earn our living.

By the same token, however, we must keep in mind that our efforts are not the direct cause of our material success; they are only a receptacle to contain G-d’s blessing. In this context, our main concern should be with making ourselves worthy of receiving G-d’s blessing. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 31, pp. 172-173; Ma’amarei Admor HaZaken 5565, vol. 2, pp. 648; Ma’amarei Admor HaZaken 5568, vol. 1, pp. 165; Derech Mitzvotecha 106a-108a; Kuntres Umayan 17 ff; Sefer HaMa’amarim 5657, pp. 56) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPARKS AND BLESSINGS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“It should not be difficult for you to set him free. For your servant has served you for six years, twice as much as a hired hand, and Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in everything you do.” (15:18)

When a person engages in work or a trade, he creates a vessel with which to invoke and receive G-d’s blessing. He need not extend himself completely, working many long and hard hours to receive that blessing.

All blessing and bounty descend from on high. The closer a person draws himself to G-d, the closer he will be to the source of blessing. In contrast, the more he engages in material pursuits, the more he distances himself from the source of blessing, and the harder he will have to work. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 190a)

Man must toil for his livelihood (cf. Bereishis 3:19). Yet no matter how hard he toils, he will profit only as much as G-d blesses him. Why, then, must we toil if the end result is always determined by G-d? And why can’t we rely on our trust in G-d that He will provide, and not work at all?

As a result of Adam’s sin, sparks of holiness were scattered throughout the world. The real reason we work is to rectify the sparks of holiness to be found in every single object in the world. As far as who will rectify which sparks, G-d decides.

Therefore, we see that certain people get an inspiration to invest in a certain business or trade, while other people have different thoughts to pursue other ways of making money.

All these inspirations stem from G-d and are His way of providing. It is completely false to believe “My strength and the power of my hand made for me all this wealth” (Devarim 8:17). (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 120a-b)

CATCHING UP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Safeguard the month of ripening, when you must offer up the Passover offering to Hashem, your G-d...” (16:1)

The lunar year is approximately eleven days shorter than the solar year, so a month is added to the Jewish calendar

every few years in order to make the lunar year “catch up” with the solar year. This ensures that the holidays - which always fall on a specific day of a specific lunar month - will also always fall in the correct season.

One of the lessons we can derive from this practice is that G-d always affords us an opportunity to “catch up,” to complete whatever we left unfinished for whatever reason, and even to counteract the effects of not having utilized our time to the fullest extent.

Moreover, this feature of the Jewish calendar implies that by bettering our behavior, we can change not only our future, but our past - erasing its deficiencies and moving forward just as if these deficiencies never existed.

Furthermore, G-d empowers us to not only neutralize the deficiency of the lunar year but to even make some lunar years longer than the solar year. This is clearly an example of how G-d intends us to be His partner in creation, bringing the world to its true fulfillment. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 34, pp. 338-341; Igrot Melech, vol. 1, pp. 428-433) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

RECEIVING BY GIVING

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Make the festival of Shavuot to Hashem, your G-d, with offerings that are the gift of your hand, according to how Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you.” (16:10)

Shavuot commemorates the Giving of the Torah. We can make ourselves into vessels to receive the Torah by engaging in acts of charity and kindness. Thus, “Make the festival of Shavuot” - prepare yourself to receive the Torah; “according to how Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you” - according to how much you share your blessings with others through charity and kindness. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 247b)

RENEWING THE WORLD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Make the festival of Shavuot to Hashem, your G-d, with offerings that are the gift of your hand, according to how Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you.” (16:10)

Shavuot is the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah. It is therefore customary to spend this holiday in the study of the Torah. This recalls how G-d gave us the Torah by pronouncing the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and then teaching the rest of the Torah to Moshe orally.

Just as G-d used His faculty of speech to create the world, so did He use His faculty of speech to infuse the world with fresh Divine consciousness at the Giving of the Torah.

Similarly, whenever we articulate the teachings of the Torah using our faculty of speech, we cause the Torah to be further revealed, thereby spreading Divine consciousness throughout creation. We thus become partners with G-d in the ongoing renewal and re-creation

of the world. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5705, p. 182) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

HANDFULS OF KINDNESS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Every man as much as his hand can give based on what they have been given.” (16:17)

The parashah concludes with a recap of the major festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkos) and the pronouncement, “Every man as much as his hand can give based on what they have been given” (16:17). The Ksav Sofer wonders why the word “hand” is included in this proclamation.

The K’sav Sofer suggests that exercising the act of physically giving with our hands accomplishes more than simply fulfilling the commandment. Giving through a child or messenger is certainly considered charity, but giving of ourselves personally (be it time, money, or other acts of kindness) acclimates our physical selves to performing these positive acts as well as satisfies our subconscious.

When we say “Pose’ach es yadecha u’masbia l’chol chai ratzon - You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing,” we acknowledge that G-d personally tends to our needs. Similarly, adding the personal touch to our acts of kindness increases those acts exponentially, not just for whom we’re helping but for ourselves as well.

HAFTORAH

ASSURED REDEMPTION

Chida

“And all your children shall be taught about Hashem, and abundant will be your children’s peace.” (Yeshayahu 54:13)

According to our Sages (Shabbos 119), Jerusalem was destroyed because the Jews neglected the education of schoolchildren. The people did not take the time to study Torah with their children. Another reason for the fall of Jerusalem was that its inhabitants harbored feelings of hatred for one another without just cause (Yoma 9).

Therefore, when G-d wishes to comfort His people and assure them of redemption, He promises that the evils that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem will be eliminated.

“All your children shall be taught about Hashem,” we are promised. All the children in Israel will study the Torah, “and abundant will be your children’s peace,” and peace and harmony shall prevail in your midst.